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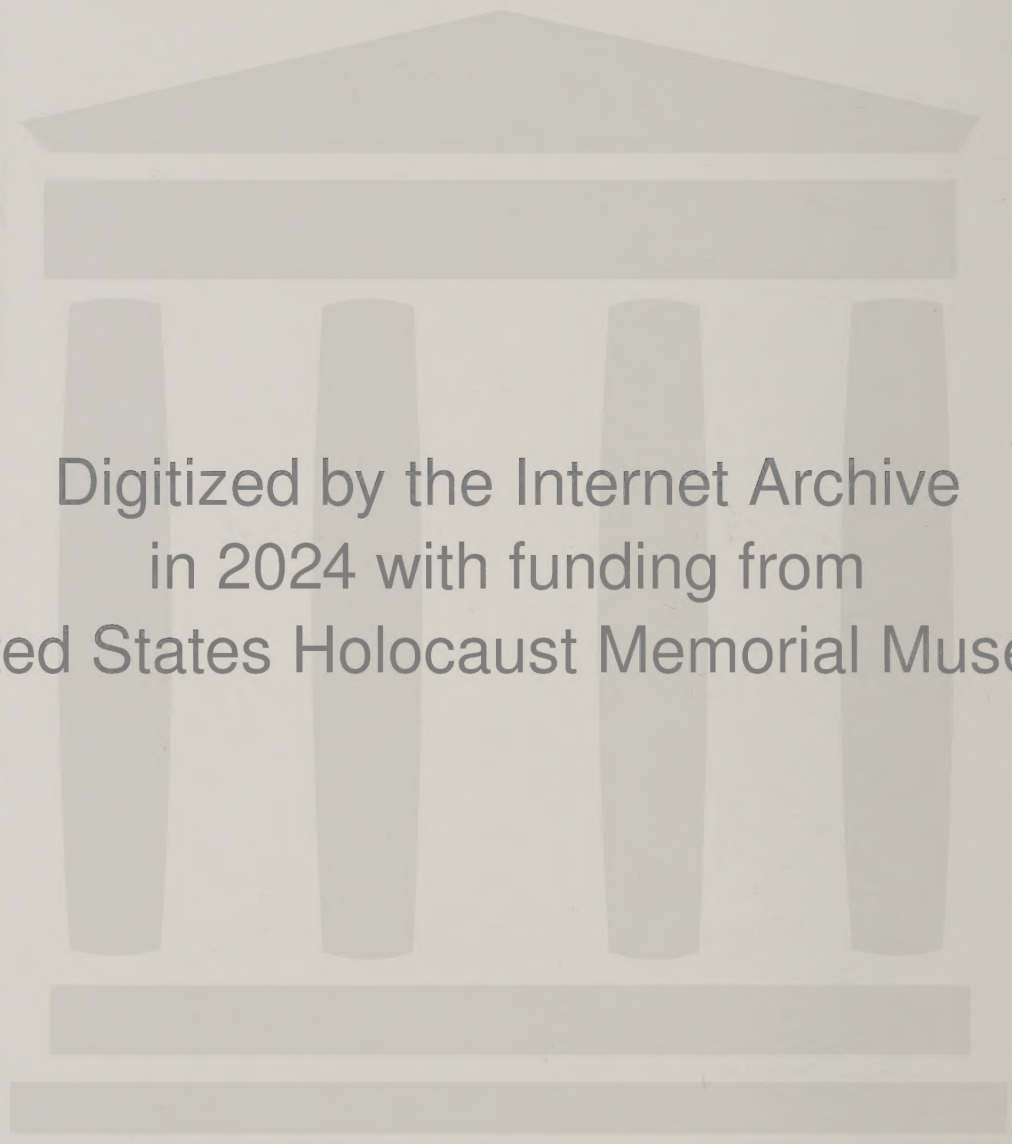
My Journey

From the Third Reich to the New World

Harry Mewes Santo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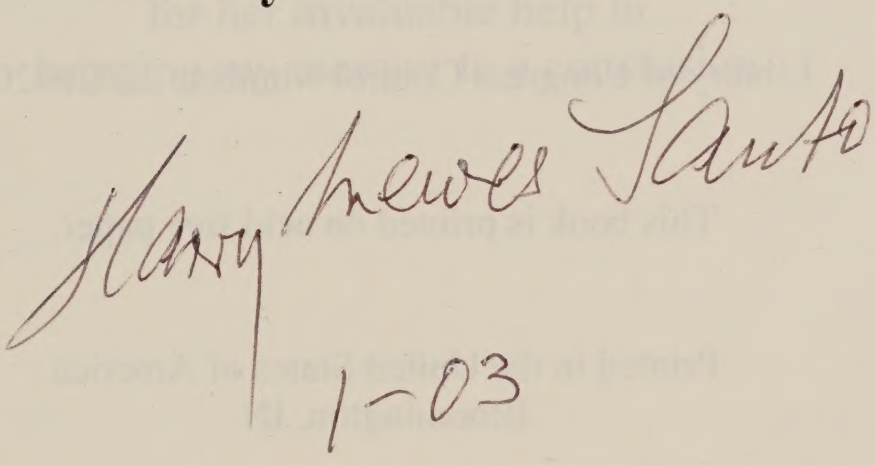
MY JOURNEY
From the Third Reich to the New World

By

Harry Mewes Santo



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In grateful memory of my grandparents,
Dr. Wilhelm and Hermine Mewes,
and my Aunt Yvonne Mewes

Special thanks to my dear wife, Anne,
for her invaluable help in
bringing my memoir to a conclusion

Culver City, California - 2002

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FOREWORD

Much has been and continues to be written about the Nazi dictatorship under which I grew up, but alas the subject remains timely since Neo-Nazis parade again in Germany, while dictators and repressive regimes are still very much with us throughout the world.

My story begins in Hamburg, seen through the eyes of a child brought up in a loving home. Hitler's take-over changed my life from that of an ordinary German boy to that of an outcast called a "Mischling," a person of mixed ancestry. At the age of ten I learned for the first time that I was half-Jewish, thus disenfranchised as non-Aryan under the Nuremberg Race Laws. This brought ostracism by former friends and school teachers, denial of higher education, and prohibited me close association with Aryans. I agonized about my identity and began searching for security elsewhere. My endeavors led to diverse experiences, adventures and misadventures in Hungary, Fascist Italy, Franco's Spain and later in postwar France.

I have tried to show what it felt like to grow up as a "Mischling" in "the New Germany," with its state propaganda and the harsh fate meted out to Germans of Jewish origin and political opponents. Among the latter was a dear aunt of mine, a school teacher whose uncompromising rejection of the regime made her a victim of the Gestapo terror.

This memoir also focuses on the war which Hitler unleashed on the world, from the early victories of the "Blitzkrieg" to the destruction of Europe's proud cities and finally to Germany's defeat.

It evokes happy times, the love and caring that bound us, family and friends, but also the deep pain felt when loved ones fell victim to injustice, cruelty and death.

I hope that these recollections will provide fresh and interesting insights into this extraordinary and calamitous period of history.

Harry Mewes Santo

THE FIRST YEARS

The event of my birth on March 14, 1923, at the home of my grandfather, Dr. Wilhelm Mewes, a dentist in Hamburg, must have been unsettling for the whole family.

My grandparents had sent their four daughters to good schools and to church, providing them with a rather strict upbringing. But how little does this mean when starry-eyed young lovers get carried away in a romantic liaison like the one which brought me into the world!

So it must have been when my mother, Gertrude Mewes, a pretty milliner's apprentice of nineteen, found the romantic attention of my father, Imre Szanto, twenty-one, a well-groomed, dashing Hungarian with an engaging foreign accent, irresistible. The son of a lawyer from the provincial town of Cegled, Imre, for the first time away from home, relished the excitement of a metropolis like Hamburg, the "Gateway to the World," with a delightful Fraeulein by his side.

All too soon it became evident that their carefree abandon had led to unforeseen consequences. In class-conscious, conservative Germany, bringing a child into the world out of wedlock meant shame to a well-respected family. After recognizing her condition, my mother brought Imre home to meet her parents. Under the circumstances they would have been happy and relieved to have him as a future son-in-law. Hoping for such an outcome, my grandmother approached Imre's parents in Hungary, proposing that the young couple formalize their bond in marriage. After all, they seemed to be in love; their fathers, a dentist and an attorney, were both professional people of similar rank. Imre's parents, however, shunned this overture, responding that he was a mere boy, certainly not ready for marriage, and especially not "outside his faith." My mother had never asked herself whether Imre might be Jewish, nor would being Jewish have presented an obstacle, for in the Germany of those days marriage across religious lines was fairly common. Yet the rejection by my father's parents was a hurtful and humiliating rebuff to my mother and the Mewes family.

To hide her condition from neighbors and from my grandfather's patients during the later months of her pregnancy, Gertrude was sent

to the countryside for several months, returning to Hamburg only days before delivering. But in the end her whole family stood loyally by her, and she gave birth to me in my grandmother's bed, helped by a midwife, as was customary in those days.

One of nature's powerful mysteries is the thrill and sense of wonder felt at the arrival of a new baby; in my case it soon melted away any rancor. So my presence became a joy not only to my mother and my three aunts who lived under the same roof, but also to my grandparents. Everyone seemed delighted to have a boy in the family. Thanks to the deep and unconditional love which my grandparents bestowed on me, I am fortunate to look back on a happy and loving childhood at the home of Opa and Oma, as German children call their grandfather and grandmother.

It is hard to believe how far back into earliest childhood my memories reach. To this day I can still recollect jumping up and down in the crib at the foot of my grandparents' beds, discovering myself with curiosity in the large mirror of their bedroom closet, then turning to the window to gaze with delight at the sky or the lush fruit trees of our backyard.

At daybreak I relish crawling into bed with Mutti (German equivalent for Mom), Oma or one of my aunts. If none of them wants me at this early hour, I can always count on a hug from Leni, our good-natured maid, before she trudges off to fire up the kitchen range and starts her many domestic chores.

My grandparents' home, a well-appointed two-story stucco house, is located in Hamburg's Harvestehude district on a busy thoroughfare named Grindelberg, on which four lines of streetcars connect the city center with the northern suburbs. We are somewhat sheltered from the traffic by a thick row of magnificent chestnut trees, in spring bursting with their white blossoms. I look forward to autumn when their pods drop to the ground, spilling dark brown chestnuts in all directions, mine for the picking.

Our house is set back from the street by a fenced-in front yard; on the lawn Opa's shingle reads Dr. Wilhelm Mewes, med. dent. To the right of the stepping stones leading to the house, well-tended flowerbeds of tulips, crocuses and pansies alternate, depending on the season, with chrysanthemums and gladiolas. In springtime, jasmine bushes perfume the air next to luxuriant rhododendrons. A glassed-in

veranda juts out toward the front yard. In mild weather this is where we have lunch and afternoon tea; when it is cold we gather in the den behind the veranda where a large tiled stove gives off an abundance of welcome heat. The spacious living room called, for reasons I fail to understand "Herrenzimmer" (gentlemen's room), is set off from the den by a heavy Gobelin tapestry depicting medieval knights on a deer hunt. Here on Opa's desk facing the front yard, I keep admiring the bronze bust which a talented patient had cast of him in his younger years. The adjoining dining room overlooks the large backyard with bushes and fruit trees. The focus of attention in this room is the magnificent black lacquered grand piano which Opa plays beautifully. Next to it stands his comfortable armchair in which he loses himself reading late into the night, sipping countless cups of black tea. After lunch, the main meal of the day, he uses the dining room for a short siesta. He curls up on the green velvet sofa by the wall, taking a few puffs from a cigar cut into four short pieces. We tiptoe out of the room to let him rest, for soon we will have to awaken him when his first afternoon patient arrives.

A graceful spiral staircase, adorned with quaint, now unused gas lamps, leads from the street level to the first floor with the waiting room and Opa's dental practice. The large, bright operating room contains two sturdy reclining dental chairs with drills over them, cabinets and tables filled with instruments and professional supplies; an antiseptic smell pervades the air. Outside on the landing near the stairway stands the telephone on a small sideboard; its number, 55 08 66, remains engraved in my memory. Whichever household member happens to be near the phone answers its ring and, if it is a patient, sets up an appointment, for grandfather works without an assistant.

Toward the back of the first floor is my grandparents' bedroom which I shared while I was very young. The adjoining dental laboratory does double-duty as family bath. The room is dominated by a massive, metal-mounted work table with Bunsen burners, centrifuges and all sorts of equipment used for molding and casting gold teeth, work that occupies Opa on many evenings and weekends. Across the room stands the bathtub and tall coal-fired water heater, used for the weekly family bathing ritual. Here, often under loud protest, I get scrubbed every morning and afternoon.

The two bedrooms facing each other on the second floor are shared by my aunts, my mother and me. There are also two enormous, musty-smelling attics. One is filled with dusty trunks, unused furniture, my toboggan awaiting winter and my old hobby-horse; the other across the hall contains, besides various discards, an enormous hand-cranked press with which Leni irons the many sheets and pillowcases used in the household. I consider the attics as my private domain, for they make marvelous play areas in bad weather. Along the walls between them stretch wide shelves with glass jars; they contain apple, cherry, strawberry and rose hip marmalades, lovingly prepared by Mutti and my aunts under Oma's expert guidance, filling the house with intoxicating aromas. They will last us all year round.

Some parts of the basement frighten me, especially those poorly-lit and damp ones, all the more since, not long ago, I saw Opa kill there a large rat, caught in a trap. The scariest is the unlit coal storage room. Opa darkly hints that to this black, forbidding realm he banishes his patients' tooth aches as well as little boys who misbehave. No wonder I am scared of the "Zahnschmerzenkeller" (tooth ache cellar)! Adjoining is our former basement kitchen with its giant range and a large wooden pot-warmer box in which I love playing hide and seek. The next room serves as a pantry, retaining the aromas of smoked ham, apples and spices. Then follows the laundry room with an enormous coal-fired tub for washing the clothes and linen. Finally there is the maid's room, years later destined to become the air raid shelter.

*****

Being the only child in the family, I depend for my entertainment and happiness on the adults around me. Mutti, young and playful, often acts like a child herself, and I can always count on her when I tire of being by myself. She calls me "Puedilein" meaning in baby talk "little brother." My grandparents are fairly reserved and formal but radiate goodness and love. Oma watches over me when her daughters are at work and saves me the best treats from the kitchen. Opa, looking dapper with his walking cane in hand, takes me after mealtimes for walks through the neighborhood. Aunt Yvonne, Opa's

oldest daughter, is a high school teacher. Though she can, at times, be a bit severe, she is my dearest and closest aunt. I call her by the nickname Aunt Ymp. Opa's youngest daughter, Aunt Lotti, is the jokester in the family, full of tricks and always good for a hearty laugh.

Today the whole family is at Randel's, a fine restaurant and "Konditorei" (pastry shop) in the Alster Valley, in a setting of giant beech trees. In the afternoon there is tea and dancing. After I enjoy a big piece of strawberry pie, Aunt Lotti takes me out to show me the goldfish pond and the squirrel cage in the garden, both very fascinating to me. During my absence a young man invited Mutti to dance. On my return I miss her from the table. "Where is Mutti?" I blurt out, always possessive of my pretty young mother. Just then I see her waltzing around the dance floor in the arms of a stranger and get very jealous. I dash out on the dance floor and start striking the intruder with my small fists, yelling "Go away. This is my Mutti!" Her face red with embarrassment, she sheepishly lets me drag her back to our table; after this ruckus the family beats a hurried retreat.

*****

Mutti works at Frau Lohmann's millinery shop but takes every opportunity to play with me at home or at the Innocentia Park, a lovely old public garden with sweeping lawns and giant chestnut trees. She tries her best to have me join other children of my age, but I am shy and tend to hang on to her apron strings.

When she is at work Oma, my aunts or Leni look after me. I entertain myself quite well alone and invent my own games: while my grandmother sews, I climb into the up-ended wooden cover of the sewing machine next to her, rocking to and fro; I see myself sailing the seven seas. When in mid-afternoon the family meets on the veranda for tea, rolls and delicious home-made jams, I play under the coffee table with our dachshund, Hexe.

To Opa's chagrin, Oma loves to go shopping at the major department stores in the inner city. By being frugal she is able to put aside some of the household money to pay for her modest shopping expeditions. Money is never abundant, there are many mouths to feed and Opa has a large mortgage to pay off. So Hermine (Oma) every so

often appeals to Willi's (Opa's) generosity for a little extra spending money. She may need fabric to make a dress for one of her daughters or herself, wool for knitting a warm sweater or thread for crocheting a tablecloth. It always takes some humoring, but after Opa moans and calls her a spendthrift, Oma usually comes up with enough money to justify a trip downtown. I am delighted when she allows me to accompany her to the glitter of the large department stores Tietz or Karstadt. Buying things is exciting, so is window shopping in the hustle and bustle of the big city, but the best is sitting down to a fancy ice cream cup or a tempting piece of cherry pie by the window of the elegant coffee shop at Tietz's, overlooking the Alster Lake. Other times when I must stay at home, I expectantly rush to the door when I hear Oma return from her shopping expedition, accosting her with the question "Did you bring me something?" And lo and behold, she always remembers me with a treat or a toy.

My grandfather almost immediately warmed to the arrival of his new grandson, the only boy in the family after having had six daughters. This makes me the sole bearer of the Mewes family name. When later Opa takes me by the hand and we stroll along the beautiful tree-lined streets of our Harvestehude neighborhood, he loves teaching me things: a student song from his youth, Beethoven's "Ode to Joy" or the opening stanza of Homer's *Iliad*. Sometimes he calls me into his dental office to show me off to his patients, to impress them with my ability to identify a melody or recite a verse which he taught me.

I spend quite a bit of time between the dental office and the waiting room, cozying up to some of the patients, especially those who are accompanied by children. When the weather is fine I invite them to play in our backyard on the swing or in the sandbox or to feed the rabbits. We are all over the house; there are so many nooks and crannies which make wonderful hiding places, like the heavy Gobelin tapestries of the living room. Once a little girl played mother and baby with me; but when, during a make-believe bathing session in the laundry room, she dwelled with fascination on the difference between her anatomy and that of a little boy, I got scared and ran off in tears to Mutti for protection.

*****

Aunt Yvonne introduces me early on to good music, theater and ballet performances. Being an outdoors person, she opens my eyes to the wonders of nature by taking me on walks and excursions, especially to the vast nature preserve of the "Lueneburg Heath" south of Hamburg.

She teaches English and French, but she is also a great admirer of Italy and its culture, and appears to speak Italian well. From time to time she invites some fellow teachers from a group called "Das italienische Kraenzchen" (Italian circle) for afternoon coffee and to practice conversation. I am intrigued with the chatter in a foreign tongue and wonder whether all that hearty laughter is in Italian as well.

My aunts, all living under the same roof, are so different in character. As much as Aunt Yvonne, the oldest one, is measured and thoughtful in everything she does, her cute kid sister Lotti is fun-loving and a big tease. Aunt Marianne, a beauty with fine features and long blond hair, is a gifted actress and singer, and her operatic engagements take her to theaters all over Germany. When she is at home, our house resounds with harmonic scale exercises, arias and popular tunes. There is a coming and going of young actors and singers; they meet here to rehearse and share with each other their enthusiasm for music and to make plans for their artistic careers. One of the steady visitors is the distinguished-looking Dr. Maurus Liertz from Cologne, destined to become Marianne's husband. Though he has a degree in medicine and practices this profession at a local hospital, his real love is opera. He uses his powerful baritone voice in a second career as an opera singer.

Oma had two daughters from a previous marriage, my half-aunts Gretel and Erna; I like them both well enough but only get to see them on their rare visits to Hamburg. Aunt Gretel, a lively, enthusiastic brunette, fascinates me with stories of her life in Madrid where, now divorced, she lives with her son Ferdinand.

Once I visited Aunt Erna, pleasant and good-natured but lacking Aunt Gretel's good looks and animation. She lives with her husband Richard Schmolze and their son, my cousin Ulli, in Meiningen, Thuringia. Quite deaf, Uncle Richard, lanky and a bit awkward, teaches mathematics at the local high school. He paints fine

watercolors of landscapes and quaint towns. Meiningen has a beautiful market square paved with cobble stones where farmers from the surrounding countryside sell their produce from carts. Though moderate in size, the town prides itself on its fine theater. On warm summer afternoons the band strikes up at the municipal park; people promenade under the old trees to the sound of waltzes, marches and medleys. I look up to Cousin Ulli, quite a few years older than I am. Tall, blond and a sports fan, he takes me picking cherries in the backyard and fishing for trout in a nearby brook.

Petsch, whose real name is Otto Damberg, is a frequent and always welcome guest to our Sunday dinner table. He hails from Riga, Latvia, where he grew up as one of many children born to a well-to-do Czarist government official. Ethnically of German descent, his native tongue is Russian; therefore he speaks German with a heavy Slavic accent. He suffers from a speech impairment which makes him hard to understand. However, his mind is full of challenging ideas and, an admirer of Leon Tolstoy, he deeply cares about humanity. As an idealist and an intellectual, his company is always valued in our midst despite his stutter. Opa, in particular, enjoys debating with him religion, politics and anything under the sun. Since Petsch is unattached and I am fatherless he often invites me, with the family's consent, to the theater, concerts and later on trips, both domestic and foreign.

*****

Great differences in personality set apart the members of our family, yet they all share a deep bond with each other. Since Opa works without an assistant, helping him operate the dental practice is a family affair. All chip in as needed, answering the telephone or the doorbell, greeting and escorting patients to the waiting room, tidying up the operating room during the lunch break while Opa takes a nap. There are also records to be kept and insurance forms to be filled out. Whoever happens to be available mixes cement, hands Opa instruments or sterilizes them at the end of a procedure. Office hours tend to be a bit unpredictable. To Oma's exasperation lunch, the main and only hot meal of the day, must often wait until Opa finishes a treatment or an interesting discussion with a patient. At supper, over

bread, cheese, cold cuts and fruit, all share with each other the day's happenings. Afterward Mutti and my aunts gather around the dining room table to knit, sew or darn socks while Oma reads aloud from a novel or Opa plays the piano.

By background our family is Lutheran. When my aunts grew up in Strassburg they attended church on Sundays, and Oma sang in the choir. She reads me Bible stories and has me kneel at night by my bedside and pray, with my hands folded: "Lieber Gott, mach mich fromm, dass ich in den Himmel komm." (Dear God, make me pious so that I may go to heaven) or "Ich bin klein. Mein Herz ist rein. Soll niemand drin wohnen als Gott allein." (I am small. My heart is pure. Let no one but God dwell in it). I love the stories Oma reads to me from a picture book of how the pharaoh's daughter found Moses in the bulrushes and raised him, and how Jesus walked on water and performed miracles. But hearing them does not make a believer of me, maybe because of Opa's free-thinking influence. Religious holidays are essentially family celebrations. At Easter there are chocolate bunnies and brightly-painted eggs hidden throughout the house or in the garden, at Christmas a richly-decorated tree with wonderful gifts under it. These are such happy occasions for all, but especially for me, the child in the family.

Leading up to Christmas, the excitement mounts as every week one more of the four candles on the Advent wreath is lit. I anguish over memorizing a poem which Aunt Yvonne has me recite on Christmas eve in front of the tree. Here I stand wearing my best suit, allowed to see for the first time this year the Christmas tree, ablaze with white candles. Then Oma leads us in singing traditional Christmas songs, accompanying herself at the piano. After "Stille Nacht, Heilige Nacht" (Silent Night) and "Oh Tannenbaum" (Oh Christmas Tree) I am finally allowed to look for and open my gifts, the big event of the evening which made it all worth waiting for. There are the long hoped-for ice skates, new railroad cars, a tunnel for my train set and more toys which make me delirious with joy. Practical gifts like shoes and clothing do not command nearly as much of my attention as those wonderful toys. The house is fragrant with the scent of holiday cooking and baking, and we sit down to a sumptuous dinner at the festively-decorated table. Tonight I am even allowed to sip a few drops of wine from a tiny liquor glass. Skipping

around between Mutti, Oma, Opa and all my lovely aunts, I am so happy, grateful to be permitted to stay up beyond my normal bedtime, feeling truly grown-up.

Taking walks is a favorite family pastime whenever the unstable Hamburg weather permits it. The quiet, tree-lined streets of the well-kept Harvestehude district with its handsome homes and villas, extending from our street to the beautiful Outer Alster Lake, are wonderful for strolling. I love to accompany Opa on his after-lunch or supper walks.

There is a new Catholic church being built near the Innocentia Park. Not having been raised a churchgoer, I ask Opa, "What is this big building?" "That is going to be a church, for God to live in," explains Opa. This prompts me to ask curiously "When will he move in?" At times, when returning from the playground, I peek into the quiet interior of the church, now completed; the altar, the statues, and the flickering candles fill me with an air of mystery.

One Sunday morning Opa takes me to see the famous St. Michael's, Hamburg's foremost Lutheran church, and the city's landmark. The view from its tall steeple enchants me. It towers above the busy harbor and the beautiful city; the people below look as tiny as ants. But when on the stroke of the hour the mighty bells, close enough to touch, start tolling, the sound is deafening, and I beg Opa to take me down to the street. We enter the church, and the pastor stands on the pulpit preaching a sermon, dressed in black except for a narrow white ruff around the neck. His voice resounds so powerfully and sternly throughout the vast auditorium that I get up and pull Opa behind me into the street.

Sundays are often devoted to family outings to Hamburg's lovely surroundings. Among our favorite destinations is the quaint hillside town of Blankenese, overlooking the Elbe and the rich farmland on the opposite bank of the river. It is a wonderful spot for watching the ocean liners, freighters and steamers sailing on the Elbe River.

Sometimes we board an excursion boat at Hamburg's "Landungsbruecken" (landing piers) passenger terminal, always bustling with activity. The ship takes us within a half-hour to Finkenwaerder, a charming old fishermen's village. Here the main catch is flounder. Hundreds of them are strung up on clothes lines to dry in the sun and wind for consumption in winter. We walk atop the

dikes that protect the orchards and farmhouses from the high tides of the Elbe.

Our family name Mewes is common among the fishermen of Finkenwaerder; there is even a street called Mewes Lane, as Opa never tires of showing us. The farmers of this area called "Altes Land" (old country) grow cherries, apples, strawberries and vegetables. Storks, some with two or three chicks in their nests atop the spic and span farm houses, are a common and endearing sight. The gables of the large farm houses are adorned with crossed horse-heads, symbols of peace and protection, dating back to pagan times. The wooden beams below the thatched straw roofs always carry an inscription carved into it, usually a prayer and the year of construction, dating back several hundred years ago.

To reach the destination of our outings we must use two, sometimes three mean of transportation, but this never deters us. We visit the magnificent "Sachsenwald" (Saxony Forest) with its giant oak and linden trees, first taking the streetcar to the Dammtor Station, then the suburban train to Bergedorf, thereafter the railroad. At times all of these conveyances are so crowded that there is only standing room.

Automobiles are rare and represent a status symbol. The only person I know who owns one is Edmund Wentzensen Sr., the father of my new Uncle Edmund, now married to Aunt Lotti. What a thrill when he invites me for the first ride of my life in his black roadster with plush leather interior, driven by a uniformed chauffeur!

*****

Growing up without brothers and sisters, and having few friends, I seem more a small adult than a typical six-year-old; therefore I am not too comfortable with children of my age. Yet here I stand at the gate of the Kielort Allee grammar school, fighting back tears when Mutti leaves me there with a bunch of boisterous, excited boys. She has dressed me up for the occasion in my good suit and given me a beautiful "Schultuete," a large, colorfully decorated cardboard cone filled with candy, as is the custom on the first day of school. Suddenly a tiny tot, aware of my unease, walks over and, with a sweet smile, puts his arm around my shoulder, saying: "Don't worry. Your

Mutti will be back. Let's be friends!" His name is Helmut and he is the smallest boy of the class; his disheveled blond hair hangs down into his freckled face. His reaching out to me at this lonely moment marks the beginning of the closest and most enduring friendship of my childhood, cut short years later when Helmut fell in the war.

Helmut's father works as a longshoreman in the port of Hamburg. He and his wife are superintendents of a tall, well-kept apartment building on Klosterallee Avenue, two blocks from my home. For their services they receive the use of a modest basement flat which they furnished comfortably. Here they raise their two children, Helmut and his sister Ella. They are reliable, industrious members of the working class with whom, in class-conscious Germany, I had until now little contact. Their speech is heavily laced with "platt-duetsch" (Low German), common among Northern German laborers and farmers. I have picked up enough of this language here and there to get by; at school some teachers hail it as a cultural treasure.

I love to explore with Helmut the large apartment house which his parents manage, from the vaulted cellars where the enormous central heating boiler huffs and groans, to the attic, high above the tree tops. Friendly and hospitable, Helmut's mother often lets me taste local dishes that are new to me. Our friendship crosses cultural and social barriers as Helmut becomes a regular visitor at our house and partakes in our afternoon tea. Then we climb the trees in the backyard, play with the rabbits, push each other on the swing or wage battles between two opposing armies of my toy soldiers.

I absolutely adore Fraeulein Hartig, our teacher during the first two school years, so warm and motherly. She handles us restless boys with such good cheer and dedication. Besides the basic skills of reading, writing and arithmetic, we learn Bible stories about Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Moses, the life of Christ as well as the Ten Commandments. Later on we are taught religion the Lutheran way two hours a week, and I get good grades in it. Some classmates are excused because they are Catholic or Jewish, but no one pays much attention to it. Every school day starts with a prayer and a hymn.

Now after getting to know the boys in my class better I feel at ease in school. In addition to the three r's, we are taught Germanic mythology, German history, general geography and "Heimatkunde" (regional history). This leads to interesting field trips to the city's

surroundings, museums and landmarks. Arithmetic is my weakest subject. In music class we learn beautiful folk songs and stirring church hymns. Since I have an ear for music, Aunt Yvonne and Petsch are paying a private teacher to give me violin lessons at home. Music becomes a joy to me, but I am not learning to play the violin well enough to give me real pleasure.

At school girls attend classes in a separate wing of the building; we boys pay scant attention to them even though we share the same schoolyard. I eye girls with curiosity and awkwardness; somehow I tend to idealize them. Since I have had so little to do with them I don't quite know how to approach them; sometimes they seem as strange to me as though they were from another planet.

POLITICAL FERMENT

It is 1932. I am in the third grade of grammar school, and political turmoil is sweeping the country. Signs of it even reach our class, with some boys spouting the political slogans which they have picked up from their parents, also the names of the parties to which they belong: SPD (Socialists), KPD (Communists) and the NSDAP (National Socialist German Workers Party). They challenge classmates from opposing political backgrounds, and there are fist fights and bloody noses. Names of personalities like Stresemann, Hitler, von Hindenburg and von Papen are bantered about, though at the age of nine there is little understanding of politics. Fanned by Nazi anti-Semitic rhetoric, for the first time we take note of who is excused from Bible classes because of Jewish family background, in my class six or seven. Some of my classmates start giving Jewish boys the cold shoulder. It causes a sensation when Ernst Danziger, a bright and popular neighbor of mine, announces that his family is emigrating to Palestine. Our teacher, Mr. Beck, and most of my classmates wish him well and seem genuinely sorry to see him leave.

There is an ever-increasing number of parades, mostly by the SA, Hitler's brown-shirt troopers, marching through our street in full regalia with their swastika flags, singing martial songs and shouting bellicose slogans.

I don't care for those dumb, noisy parades; instead I board with some of my fellow third-graders the No. 8 streetcar for the outlying, undeveloped Gross Borstel area. Here we run wild about the bogs, marshes and ponds, catching tiny stickleback fish and polliwogs for our aquariums. At home I get a scolding when I return covered with mud. I cannot wait till the polliwogs turn into tiny frogs. Unfortunately, my prized catches never live longer than a few days, no matter how well I feed them.

Quite a few of my classmates join the "Jungvolk," the cub scout division of the Hitler Youth, especially since the exciting games, outings, picnics and sing-alongs appeal to boys. The new recruits try to impress the rest of us with their snappy uniforms. At times I envy them for their shiny belt buckles, outings and campfires. However, deep within I know that all this political hoopla is not for me, and that

any interest I might possibly show in it would surely set off a storm of protest at home.

Talk about politics becomes increasingly common at the family dinner table. Opa says that quite a few of his patients look with great expectation upon the National Socialists as the Party that will restore order and turn the country's fortunes around from stagnation to prosperity. But he and the whole family have strong misgivings about the Nazis. True enough, all are concerned about Germany's high unemployment and hard times, legacies attributed to the injustices of the Versailles Peace Treaty. The Mewes family was directly affected by its harsh terms, which caused Opa to lose his home and livelihood in Strassburg. But they consider Hitler a dangerous demagogue and hope that von Hindenburg, a respected war hero, will be able to stand up to him and his bullies.

For weeks the world intently follows the power struggle in Berlin. Then on January 30, 1933, there is disturbing news: yielding to pressure, von Hindenburg reluctantly appoints Adolf Hitler chancellor of Germany, giving him unrestricted powers. Hitler promises to build a great empire which he calls "The Third Reich," and predicts that it will rule Germany for a thousand years.

At school the Nazi supporters are savoring their victory, throwing their weight around and making new converts. Some teachers start wearing NSDAP swastika insignias on their lapels identifying them as Party members. They proudly use the just-decreed mandatory "Heil Hitler" salute, and we are instructed to follow their example. Those teachers who do not seem happy with the "Macht-Uebernahme" (the Nazi seizure of power) still greet us with the familiar "good morning," but for how much longer? Suddenly people find themselves on one side of the fence or the other. Defying Party orders is not tolerated, in keeping with the endlessly repeated slogan: "Those who are not with us, are against us." All over town the walls are plastered with propaganda posters. At school placards show radiant, heroic-looking Nordic youths in Hitler Youth uniforms, with the inscription: "Fight for Fuehrer and fatherland!" Wherever you turn the messages are crass, defiant, belligerent.

On February 27, 1933, barely a month after the "Macht-Uebernahme," the Reichtstag (parliament building) in Berlin goes up in flames. Though the government blames the Communist arch-

enemies for the deed, many believe that the Nazis themselves started the blaze in order to incite the general population against Hitler's opponents, to help him consolidate his power.

Today all of the teachers and the student body are ordered to assemble in the school yard to meet a new administrator; he is appointed to supervise the implementation of the "Gleichschaltung" (bringing everything into line) in Hamburg's public school system, to make sure that all conform to the "new thinking." We are all lined up with our teacher by class, boys to one side, girls to the other. Up front formations of boys in "Jungvolk" and girls in "BDM (Bund Deutscher Maedchen" - Association of German Girls) uniforms greet the dignitary with the kind of heroic songs that the Nazis are so fond of, and which they now teach us in class:

> A young nation, ready for battle.
> Raise the banners higher, comrades!
> Our heroic ancestors watch us from above.
> Germany, Fatherland, we come to your rescue!

The school principal introduces the party official, citing his high standing in the NSDAP. He booms at us "Heil Hitler" and we have been coached to answer him loudly in kind. He speaks of Hitler's long struggle, of the sacrifices he and his followers have made to win over the nation's hearts and minds, of the Fuehrer's special commitment to us, Germany's youth, the "guarantors of tomorrow." The work to lead Germany from ruin and shame to glory and ultimate triumph has just begun, and dedicating ourselves to this great goal is our highest duty. Victory is not won until the Jews in our midst are removed from power. We must all give our very best, in and out of school and in the Hitler Youth, to hasten the day of ultimate victory.

The meeting ends with the singing of the Horst Wessel song, named after the Nazi martyr. It has just been decreed to be Germany's new national anthem:

> Up with the flag! Close the ranks!
> The SA troopers march confidently.
> Comrades, shot by the Red Front and reactionaries,
> March in spirit with our ranks.

Clear the street for our brown shirt battalions!
Clear the street for the storm troopers!
Millions already look to the swastika - full of hope.
The daybreak for freedom and bread is upon us.

The signal sounds, for one last charge.
We all stand ready for the struggle.
Soon, Hitler's flags will wave over all streets,
The days of slavery will be short-lived!

I feel bewildered and confused by this strange, ominous ceremony, probably not the last one we shall witness. Our Jewish classmates look ill at ease; the hostile rhetoric must make them feel like sinking into the ground.

Anti-Semitic sentiment is being viciously fanned everywhere. Menacing posters declaring "Die Juden sind an Allem Schuld" (The Jews are the cause of all of our misfortunes) scream from walls all over the city. Signs "No Jews allowed" start appearing in stores and restaurants.

Barely two months after Hitler's take-over, the Party calls for a boycott of all Jewish establishments. The word "Jude" (Jew) or the Star of David is crudely painted in bold letters on the walls and show windows of Jewish stores, large and small. Shoppers may never have paid much attention whether a firm was Jewish-owned, but now SA troopers intimidate them to pass those businesses by. Oma, returning from downtown, says that in the shopping district the SA and Hitler Youth kept shouting anti-Semitic slogans in unison in front of several large department stores.

Decrees just issued bar Jews from exercising their professions as doctors, dentists, lawyers and teachers. We all regret losing our long-time family doctor, Dr. Boehm, who is Jewish. He is a fine doctor, dear to all of us, in fact, the only doctor I have ever known.

It is rumored that the two Jewish teachers at our school will soon have to leave. Aunt Yvonne says that these new rules will hit the high schools and colleges even harder since they have more Jewish teachers than the grade schools.

The radio and the newspaper articles glorify Germanic valor and Aryan virtues while railing against Jewish-inspired decadence. Dr. Goebbels' state propaganda machine is working full steam. People who feel sickened by all of this better learn to keep their mouths shut, for opposition to the regime is not tolerated and can have dangerous consequences. Aunt Yvonne, who teaches English and French at the Heilwig School for Girls, chafes under the pressures brought upon her and her colleagues to conform to Party demands. Like many intellectuals, she is outraged by the bonfires the SA troopers are making of books that the Nazi ideologues disapprove of. Opa, who agrees with her in principle, warns her:

"Yvonne, be careful and keep your opinions to yourself. You know how they deal these days with opponents of the regime, and they are especially watching teachers."

In the past my Jewish classmates had been treated like everyone else. However now, incited by the incessant anti-Semitic propaganda, insults and intimidation are commonplace, and even beatings are on the rise. Therefore, more and more of them are transferring to the nearby Talmut Tora School. Otto Baer and Heinz Landsberg are preparing to emigrate, one to Canada, the other to Uruguay. They were lucky to have gotten immigration visas so quickly with the help of relatives living in those countries. Heinz and I have been neighbors, and with his sister Flora, whom I call Florchen, have gone ice skating on the Alster and the Isebeck canal. I am at the their home to bid them farewell. The apartment is empty except for a few trunks, each bearing a government-stamped list enumerating the few personal effects they are allowed to take with them. Heinz talks excitedly about their impending voyage to Montevideo, to a new life, but little Florchen, always so sweet and gentle, looks very sad, and her eyes well up with tears as we part.

WHO AM I?

Mutti has completed a three-year apprenticeship at Frau Lohmann's millinery shop on Bismarckstrasse but continues working there. The showroom, with ladies hats of every shape and color displayed on stands and on mannequins, is a short flight of stairs above the busy street; behind it lies the workshop in which the fanciful creations are cut, shaped and steamed on wooden molds. Frau Lohmann is a lanky, dark woman in her fifties, gossipy and good-natured despite her somewhat witch-like appearance. Having no children of her own, she is always delighted to have me visit; her shop has been my second home for as long as I can remember. I often drop by after school on the way home, staying either for a few minutes or a part of the afternoon until Mutti's work is done. Today I arrive at the shop from physical education class expecting to find Mutti there, but she has already left for home. Liesel, the apprentice, is not there either, and Frau Lohmann, whom I call Aunt Lohmann, invites me, as she so often does, to come in for a glass of raspberry juice. Suddenly it occurs to me that now, being alone with her, may be the perfect time to ask her about something that has been on my mind for quite a while. Aware of being brought up by Mutti, my grandparents and my aunts, while other kids are raised by two parents, I have long been curious about my father, what he looked like and what sort of person he was. Mutti seems ill at ease and changes the subject whenever I inquire about him. She has told me his name, that he is Hungarian and that shortly after I was born he left Hamburg to live abroad. Occasionally she receives mail from him, but she and everybody else in the family seem evasive about the subject. I remember having heard Aunt Lohmann say that my father used to come to her shop when he was going with Mutti, even later around the time when I was born. Therefore, she should be able to satisfy my mounting curiosity about him.

"Yes, my boy, I knew your father. He was a nice young man, very polite and well groomed. I remember how worried he was when you were on the way, and I thought that he and Mutti would make a nice couple. He used to say that he would have liked to marry her,

but his family in Hungary was raising such a fuss about him being too young and the difference in religions."

"What do you mean by that?" I ask her, not understanding what she is trying to say.

"Well, I mean on account of your father being Jewish."

"Jewish? He is Catholic. Mutti told me so herself," I blurt out.

"Perhaps he may have later become a Catholic, but he was born a Jew."

Seeing my disbelief and distress, Aunt Lohmann is visibly disturbed to have unintentionally told me something that Mutti had evidently withheld from me. Though at this very moment I do not grasp the full significance of it, in a flash I realize that having in Nazi Germany a Jewish father is awful beyond words. Every day I witness around me the scorn that is being heaped on everything Jewish, and how Jews are being accused of every vile act. Except for a few fellow students and our next door neighbors, the Gottgetreus, all good people, I hardly know any Jews, nor do I understand just what it means to be Jewish. But my ignorance will surely not shield me from being linked to Jewishness, at a time when virulent anti-Semitism is state policy!

"I am sorry I was so frank with you, Harry. I thought your Mutti had told you this by now," Aunt Lohmann whispers mortified.

It suddenly hits me: there were times when some wise guys in class had teased me when I befriended one or another Jewish classmate.

"I don't know about you, Harry. Aren't you perhaps one of them? You do look like one, with that big nose of yours!"

As they snickered I, unsuspecting, just smiled and never paid any attention to their remarks. After all, even Opa has a rather prominent nose, the feature they always pick on when baiting Jews.

Confused and near tears I run home to Mutti and Oma. They anguish when I tell them what I just learned.

"Is it true what Aunt Lohmann said about my father being Jewish?" I burst out.

"Yes, it's true, Puedi. Don't be angry that I never spoke to you about it!" sobs Mutti. "I didn't want to see you get hurt, my darling. I meant to hold off telling you about your father until you were older and would have a better understanding of such things. In ordinary

times, what difference does it make whether one is Jewish or Christian? I suppose I should have told you sooner now that the question of ancestry keeps coming up all the time."

"Yes, sweetheart," both Mutti and Oma hug and assure me, "you will always be our sweet boy, and nothing can ever change that."

As this new reality gradually sinks in, it is comforting that the family stands firmly by me. Eventually we speak of other things but my feelings about myself remain in turmoil. Racial purity has been made the touchstone of a person's worth. I continue to play and chat with my friends and classmates as if nothing has happened and try to put the subject out of my mind. Yet deep within I know that I can never be like the others, never measure up to the one requirement indispensable for being accepted in today's Germany: to be Aryan. I will always be looked down upon as a "Mischling" (person of mixed blood). As much as I loath Nazi ideology, unwittingly I have swallowed the government's propaganda bait that only Aryans are human beings of worth. This myth, endlessly repeated, holds me tightly in its grip, no matter how much I tell myself it is false. Were I rooted in Jewish culture I would, I am sure, not suffer from the sense of self-deprecation that assails me now.

Those near me sense my torment and try to help me cope with it. Aunt Yvonne continues to take me on wonderful trips to the nature preserves of the Lueneburg Heath. Here in fall the hillsides are ablaze with purple heather called "Erika," set off by austere junipers and graceful birch trees with their white trunks. On lonely slopes shepherds tend to their flocks of "Heidschnucken," a local breed of sheep. The serenity of this solitary countryside helps me forget my troubles for a while.

We hike or bicycle far with our knapsacks, resting when we find an inviting spot along the Oertze or another clear brook. In the late afternoon we seek lodging and eat a simple meal at a country inn or farmhouse. These are huge, built not only to hold the farmer's family and hired hands under the same moss-covered, straw-thatched roof, but also the cattle, horses, pigs, chickens as well as hay, farm wagons and implements. In the morning we awake to the crowing of the roosters and to the thumping of the horses' hoofs and their winnowing in the stable adjoining our guest room. A hearty farmers' breakfast of fried bacon, eggs and potatoes is served with dark, oven-baked bread,

home-churned butter and marmalade from fruit of their own orchards. We return home from these outings renewed and strengthened.

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Nowadays, the announcement "Der Fuehrer spricht" (the Leader will speak) electrifies the nation; Hitler's speeches are to many of his admirers an almost religious experience. Broadcast all over the country, they bring life to a virtual standstill. Everyone is ordered to listen to them over the radio in public places, schools and offices.

Today Hitler addresses a rally at a large fair ground. I have been bussed there with scores of noisy school children, happy to trade their classes for all this excitement and to hail the nation's savior. Thousands of people from all walks of life are here jamming the field, in street clothes or Nazi uniforms, to see the Fuehrer with their own eyes, listen to his every word and join in the general jubilation. In this sea of Nazi banners, brown-shirted SA bands play rousing marches, Hitler Youth choruses sing patriotic songs or chant in unison: "Deutschland erwache!" (Germany awake), "Ein Reich, ein Volk, ein Fuehrer!" (one country, one people, one leader) and "Fuehrer befehl - wir folgen!" (Leader command - we follow).

As Adolf Hitler appears on the podium, surrounded by a large contingent of Party dignitaries, wild ovations erupt. His speech is riveting, his manner clipped and commanding. He speaks with messianic fervor of the privilege and the pride of serving the fatherland at this unique time of national awakening, ending the failures and humiliations of the past. He exhorts his listeners to dedicate themselves totally to hard work and sacrifice for Germany's glorious future, to do their share to create a new world order and a great German empire that will endure a thousand years! But to make this possible, the shameful Versailles Peace Treaty must be overturned and the nation's vicious enemies, above all Communism and Bolshevik Judaism, defeated. People keep interrupting him with wild applause. The meeting ends with the singing of both the old and the new national anthems, followed by unending exultation and frenetic chants of "Sieg Heil" (hail to victory)!

This is indeed a most enthusiastic crowd, and many, perhaps most of those present, are attending this rally and cheering "the Fuehrer" of

their own free will. They seem swept away, ecstatic to witness this glorious moment, feeling part of this "great patriotic awakening" as Hitler calls it. Under the spell of his powerful personality and compelling oratory most come away deeply moved, many with tears of pride and joy in their eyes.

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Obsessed with the idea of racial purity, the government has decreed that every German must have an "Ahnenpass" (ancestral passport) to prove his Aryan descent. This obviously creates a major dilemma for me. In class they have had us working already for weeks on personal family trees, so far voluntarily. Now however, they hand us a form containing specific questions about our race and religion. It must be returned to the registrar's office within a month, carefully prepared and signed under oath by the parents. The matter is being most earnestly discussed at home, and it is decided, true to the rule "Ehrlich waehrt am laengsten" (honesty is the best policy), to declare my half-Jewish ancestry. Oma, the matriarch and the family spokesperson, completes the form and turns it in at the school office in person. I am very nervous about this "Ahnenpass," documenting me for the first time as a "juedischer Mischling ersten Grades" (of mixed Jewish parentage, first degree).

I confide in my closest friend Helmut about my ancestry, and to my relief he takes my disclosure with indifference; he is only concerned for my welfare. Helmut's father, a dock worker, always had and still has Communist leanings which put him and his family at odds with the Nazi regime; therefore Helmut resists joining the "Jungvolk." These days it is most important to know how one's friends and neighbors feel about politics; a careless remark can get you or your family into a lot of trouble.

When I visit my good friend and close-by neighbor Werner I often spend more time chatting with his mother than playing with him. Werner's father holds a responsible position at the main post office. Like so many civil servants he has seen fit to join the Party, who knows whether from conviction or to help his advancement. Though Werner's mother still greets me with the old "Guten Tag" (good day) rather than the repulsive Hitler salute, the living room wall is now

dominated by a large portrait of the "Fuehrer" which makes me uneasy. She often engages me in small talk about everything under the sun: birthdays, family outings or her youth in her native Harz Mountains. But now she cannot stop singing the glories of the "New Germany." Her eyes light up as she praises the Nazi accomplishments and gushes about her hopes for a bright future. Perhaps, she says, her family may move some day into one of the housing developments that the government plans to build in Stellingen. The family has already taken part in several KdF "Kraft durch Freude" - (strength through joy) Sunday outings, organized by the Party. They were so pleased with last month's "Fahrt ins Blaue" (mystery trip) to Lake Ploen where the harvest festival was being celebrated with folk dancers in native costume.

Werner and I have been friends and playmates for years. Together with Helmut, the three of us used to play in the hide-out we had built in my backyard. To prove what tough guys we were, we made ourselves sick smoking cigarettes that I had pinched from Aunt Marianne. As close as we are, I don't dare to tell Werner about my ancestry, for that would surely end our long friendship. Unfortunately, it will only be a question of time till he finds out about it from someone else.

Some of my classmates are no longer as friendly and natural with me as they used to be in simpler times. My former pal Otto really hurt my feelings last week in the schoolyard, announcing with a jeer "I no longer have any use for you now that it turns out you are a half-Jew."

HIGH SCHOOL DAYS

I have now reached the age when children destined to pursue higher education leave grammar school for a so-called "Gymnasium." Since Opa graduated from the distinguished gymnasium called "Johanneum School of Scholars," it is decided to have me enrolled in this fine, old school though I am far from being a brilliant student. The tuition is steep and money not plentiful at home. However, Opa agrees to pay the main portion; Aunt Yvonne and our family friend Petsch will pick up the balance. So I take leave from my old schoolmates and teachers. Except for recent difficulties, grammar school has with the passing of time become dear to me; I wonder how it will compare with the Johanneum.

My old school had been a stone's throw from home; my new one, near the Stadtpark (municipal park), takes a good half hour to reach, first walking, then taking the Hochbahn (elevated train). Sometimes I return home on foot through the peaceful tree-lined avenues, a 45-minute walk.

The school day begins with the flag raising in the courtyard girded by colonnades, while we stand at attention to the Hitler salute and sing the old and the new national anthems. All students wear the distinctive blue school cap; different color ribbons around the rim indicate the school year. On Mondays the school principal, a distinguished gentleman and war veteran, greets and addresses the student body with his raspy voice in the "Aula" assembly hall, ending with a prayer and a church hymn. Lately his thoughtful words are often followed by strident political oratory of one of the Party firebrand teachers.

True to its name "School of Scholars" and to its tradition, the Johanneum is a rather conservative school, and the student body more "Aryan" than my grammar school used to be. Upon enrollment my compromising ancestry becomes part of the record. What reception will this get me? I must admit that most teachers treat me decently and probably not much differently from the other students. But some, among them my biology and the physical education instructors, are true Nazi zealots; they scorn students like me and rarely miss an opportunity to deride or ridicule anything or anyone Jewish.

Fortunately others are fair and caring. My favorite is our white-maned music teacher, a wonderful person who also conducts the student orchestra. He invites me to play in the second violin section, I suspect to make me feel included rather than because of my merits as a violinist. To justify his confidence in me I practice my violin more seriously than ever before; I really enjoy playing in the orchestra. My closest classmate is Guenter, always friendly and cheerful, also a mediocre fiddler like me. In the orchestra we share the same music stand; in class, sitting across from each other, we often help one another. In general I keep very much to myself to avoid trouble.

On the way to school I often run into Heinz. I had taken him for Jewish, but though his mother is Aryan like mine he is classified as "Geltungsjude" (legally considered Jewish) since he was raised in the Jewish religion. He is an outstanding student which, however, does not especially endear him to his classmates. His father owns a furniture store, and the family worries what may become of it and of their livelihood since all Jewish businesses will soon be "Aryanized." We both live in the Harvestehude district; therefore that nitwit Joachim and some other louts slander our neighborhood, calling it "New Palestine." They hiss maliciously: "Why don't you stay over there where you belong." Fighting back gets one nowhere; one only risks being roughed up as it happened last week to Kurt from the class across the hall. At moments like these I wish I were back with my old grammar school buddies.

The backbone of our curriculum is Latin, considered the basis of humanistic and academic education. I work hard at it; that pleases Opa who venerates classical antiquity and spends many an evening reading Roman and Greek writers in their original versions. We also study some English and French; Aunt Yvonne tutors me in both subjects. I am a mediocre student, good at compositions, poor in math for which my grasp is limited.

History is taught with a jingoistic slant, especially since our teacher is an arch-Nazi. In biology Mendel's laws of heredity get top billing; though meant for the study of plants and animals, they are being misused to buttress the relevance of Nazi race theories.

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Today all are ordered to the "Aula" to listen to an important radio address broadcast from the Party congress in Nuremberg, the holy grail of the National Socialist movement. Against a backdrop of Wagnerian opera themes and Nazi fanfare, the Party leaders announce new laws being enacted "for the protection of German blood and German honor." They strip non-Aryans of their civil rights and forbid relations and marriage between Aryans and non-Aryans. More hateful oratory and endless chants of "Sieg Heil, Sieg Heil" end the broadcast from Nuremberg. I feel shaken by what I have just heard, and am very concerned how these new laws will affect me and my future. When I return home the family is as upset about this scandalous legislation as I am. Aunt Yvonne also had to listen with her students to this latest infringement to civil rights and is highly indignant.

I feel more and more sickened by the police state that Germany is becoming, and find it harder and harder to draw the distinction between what is Nazi and what is German. At an age when I need to believe in something good and noble, what is there in which to put my faith? I love my homeland, its beauty and my wonderful family, always standing by me so faithfully. From childhood on, at home and in school, I have been taught to look upon this country as a nation of culture, poets and thinkers. Who can deny what Germany has given the world in the poetry of Goethe, Schiller and Lessing, in the philosophy of Schopenhauer, Nietsche and Kant, and the sublime music of Bach, Beethoven and Brahms. But to me German now comes to represent Hitler (who was not even born a German), Goering, Goebbels and their ilk, whom I detest and who look upon people like me as scum.

HUNGARIAN RHAPSODY

I know that my father, about whom I fantasize more and more, is Hungarian, and that he lives in Italy. Though I know virtually nothing about that country, its people and its language, I start romanticizing everything about it. I even pin a Hungarian pennant over my desk and play Hungarian music on our gramophone, to the displeasure of my grandparents. My turning away from things German must hurt them, but they seem to understand that my infatuation with Hungary is an escape from the pressures that weigh upon me.

Petsch often invites Mutti and me to the Alster Pavilion on the Jungfernstieg for Saturday afternoon tea. It is an elegant cafe on the shores of the Inner Alster Lake in the heart of Hamburg; from its picture windows one has a wonderful view across the lake to the Lombards Bridge. The Alster Pavilion is the place to enjoy mouth-watering pastries, thrill to the strains of Barnabas von Gezi's Hungarian gypsy violin orchestra and chat with friends. Nowadays, of course, one can't be careful enough what one says in public places. Every day people are arrested and disappear for remarks made considered hostile to the government. One must develop the habit of looking over one's shoulder to check who may be within earshot.

A life-long and passionate traveler, Petsch has plans for a three-week trip to Austria and Yugoslavia during summer vacation, and for my benefit he would include Hungary. The question is, will the family allow him to take me along on such a trip, and especially stopping a few days in Cegled so that I can meet my grandmother, Aunt Maria and Cousin Agi? I am thrilled beyond words with the idea. Mutti is agreeable, but getting permission from Opa, Oma and Aunt Yvonne won't be easy.

Petsch had taken me with him during summer vacations to wonderful parts of Germany such as the Harz Mountains and the Rhine Valley. My family is glad that he gives me a chance to broaden my horizon. However, the idea of calling on my father's relatives in Hungary on the way to Yugoslavia is received coolly. Resentment still lingers against the Szanto family, for my grandparents have not forgotten their opposition to their son marrying Mutti. But the years

have mellowed their hurt; realizing how smitten I am with the idea and trusting Petsch's judgment, they finally give their consent. Two months still remain until departure, time enough to apply for a passport and to work out the details of our brief visit with my Hungarian grandmother.

The contact between Mutti and my father has never completedly ceased. Over the years he has written to her sporadically from wherever he was living at the time: London, Paris, Palma de Mallorca, New York, Budapest, now Genoa. Mutti is not eager to talk much about him but admits that he inquires about me. Not being well to do, he nonetheless from time to time sends some money to help raise me. Mutti writes him about me and encloses snapshots. My thoughts of him are vague but occupy my mind. I understand that he disappointed Mutti and that she still harbors resentments. Finding out, a few years ago, that he is Jewish, was, of course, a hard blow for me, a calamity in today's political climate. I feel threatened about my ancestry but cannot help becoming increasingly curious about my father, and hope to meet him sometime soon. Mutti says that in his letters he expresses concern about the growing anti-Semitism in Germany and whether it affects me. I am excited that the planned trip to Hungary will not only give me a chance to meet his mother, sister and niece, but also to see the country which I have built up so much. My Hungarian grandmother writes she longs to meet me, her only grandson.

Petsch is close to thirty years older than I am, but we make good travel companions. He is truly a man of the world and relates surprisingly well to youth and its impulses. On our trips I deal with waiters, desk clerks and ticket agents since his stutter and his Russian accent make him hard to understand. He is somewhat of a hypochondriac and considers himself a weakling; yet when we travel, especially by railroad, he displays great stamina. This becomes evident on the way to Hungary: the first leg of our trip, Hamburg to Salzburg, takes about twelve hours. With the Baedecker travel guide in hand, we explore for two days this elegant Mozart city in the shadow of the Hohensalzburg fortress. Then follows beautiful Vienna, much admired for its music and art. The magnificent Hofburg and Schoenbrunn Castles, the Opera House and St. Stefan's Dome still reflect the splendor of the former capital of the Austro-

Hungarian empire. This is my first trip abroad, making everything particularly thrilling.

I can hardly wait to reach Hungary. With its wonderful music, immortalized by Franz Liszt's Hungarian Rhapsodies and Brahms' Hungarian Dances, it offers me a fantasy escape from all that I dislike about Hitler's Germany. My excitement mounts as we reach the border town of Hegyeshalom, and the uniformed customs officer stamps the Hungarian emblem with the royal crown into my passport. I must admit that from the train window nothing looks very regal; in fact, the railroad stations and villages along the way are drab and shabby. However, Budapest makes up for it in majesty and beauty. Our hotel has the old Austro-Hungarian flavor: on the boulevards well-dressed people dine in colorful sidewalk restaurants to the strains of gypsy violins. We are fascinated by the imposing view from the historic Fisher Bastion on the slopes of the Buda hills down to the majestic parliament building on the shores of the Danube. With charm and music everywhere we truly enjoy the three days of our stay. Budapest lives up to my expectations as the capital of my Hungarian dream. Yet it doesn't take me long to realize that, without understanding its language and its culture, I will always remain a stranger to Hungary which I have been so childishly idealizing.

The train takes about an hour and a half to reach Cegled, my father's home town. Petsch tries to dispel my nervousness about meeting for the first time my paternal relatives. Grandmother knows that we are arriving with the late afternoon train; she has proposed that rather than meeting at the station we get to know each other at the family home. Since there are no cabs, we hail one of the horse-drawn "fiaker" carriages lined up in front of the station.

After the splendor of Vienna and Budapest, Cegled looks provincial; in fact, I must admit, downright dull. It is only a short ride to the main square; it has the monument of a national hero in the center and two churches at opposite sides. Grandmother's house is just a block away, and no sooner do we arrive than she, Aunt Maria and Cousin Agi come running to greet us. They hug and kiss me effusively as is customary in Hungary, talking and laughing excitedly. Petsch watches the scene with quiet amusement. I am thrilled to meet them, but my reserved upbringing leaves me unprepared for the

warmth of the reception. Fortunately, they speak a little German though with a strong but engaging Hungarian lilt.

"You look just like Imre, your father!" they all exclaim.

Grandmother shows us around the spacious house. The well-appointed living and dining rooms face the street, as does my late Grandfather's law office where weighty law books and diplomas line the walls. The room has remained unchanged since he passed away four years ago. Then follow several bedrooms. On the other side of the courtyard a steep staircase leads down to the vaulted cellar where the wine harvested in the family vineyard ages in large wooden barrels.

After freshening up and unpacking, we join our hosts in the dining room for a hearty supper and a lot of conversation. All treat me most cordially and Petsch with great respect. Grandmother, whose German language skills are very limited, has Aunt Maria and Cousin Agi interpret her thoughts for us. She praises her late husband and his standing in the community as a lawyer; his picture looks down on us from the wall behind the desk. She also speaks with pride of her two sons, Imre, the businessman, and Pista, the opera singer, both of whom she would love to have near her now that she is widowed. But, alas, both find Hungary confining and, like many of their countrymen, seek their fortunes in the wide world. Aunt Maria, an attractive and charming brunette, is curious about my life and family. All are concerned about conditions in Germany from where the news has lately been very alarming. Aunt Maria finds life in Cegled dull, having lived with her daughter and late husband for years in Budapest. But when grandmother became widowed she felt her mother needed her at home. Cousin Agi is a pretty girl exactly my age, with a winning smile and a hundred questions to ask. News of our visit has spread to friends and relatives, and they are all invited to a reception in our honor tomorrow afternoon.

The house is overflowing with people, too numerous for me to learn their names and just how they are related, here to welcome Imre's son from far-away Hamburg. All are laughing, hugging, chattering in Hungarian or struggling to speak German to us while consuming large amounts of "palacsinta" (crepes) and other delicious pastries which two maids keep serving. Of all the visitors I am most taken by Keranus and Siranus Avanesian, the exotic and charming

daughters of a family friend, an Armenian carpet merchant. Quiet, dark-skinned Siranus, with her sparkling black eyes, really captured my heart. She promises to write to me but that won't be easy since there is a real language barrier between us.

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Today Grandmother takes us to visit the family vineyard in Balla Dullo. Growing grapes and making wine was Grandfather's hobby, but since his death Grandmother carries on as best she can. To reach the vineyard we ride a rickety old narrow-gauge railroad train. The locomotive huffs and puffs through the flat countryside along fields of corn and bright sunflowers; clouds of white smoke rise from its tall, narrow stack, and it emits a loud whistle before each road crossing. Every few minutes the little train stops to discharge or to take on passengers, and after about twenty minutes we reach our destination. Grandmother leads the way to the vineyard where neatly-planted vines, about four feet tall, cling to wooden stakes. The grapes are growing in healthy clusters ready to be harvested within a few weeks. Next to the simple farm house stands an old well made of white-washed bricks, into which an enormous pail dangles, suspended from a wooden pole. Farm hands fill smaller pails to water the vines. The caretaker and his wife live in the white farm house; they rush out to meet Grandmother when they see her arrive and speak to her deferentially. She goes to the vineyard almost every weekday by the first train to plan and supervise the work that needs to be done.

It is market day in Cegled and farmers sell their fruit, vegetables and flowers from horse-drawn wagons on the town square. Next to them butchers, bakers and other merchants loudly hawk their wares. It is a lively and colorful scene. Aunt Maria takes us to pay a visit to old UncleYancsi, plagued by gout and diabetes; he was not well enough to come to the party the day before yesterday. Frail but animated, the elderly gentleman is delighted to have callers from Germany. He speaks enthusiastically of his younger days when he was studying in Munich. It is evident that he is a man of breeding, and he speaks German surprisingly well. Under the Austro-Hungarian monarchy business took him often to Vienna, and he

entertains us with anecdotes and recollections of the days when Emperor Franz Joseph ruled the Hapsburg Empire.

Our visit to Cegled has been very rewarding; now it is time to bid my newly-discovered relatives farewell and catch an early train for Budapest. From there we have a long day of railroading ahead of us to reach the resort of Bled. The train to Ljubljana passes along cornfields, vineyards, fruit orchards and long stretches of Hungarian "Puszta" steppes where cattle are grazing; occasionally we see cowboys on horseback. We catch a few glimpses of Lake Balaton. By early afternoon we cross the border into Yugoslavia. The monotony of the plains gives way to hills and then increasingly high and rugged mountains. Local peasants carrying produce board the train for short rides. They chew sunflower seeds and spit the shells on the ground; the corridors of the train and platforms of the station are covered with them. We change trains in Ljubljana, and by nightfall we arrive at the hotel in Bled where Petsch made a reservation.

After our visits to Vienna, Budapest and the excitement of meeting so many family members in Cegled, we welcome spending a few days of rest in Bled. Nestled in the Julian Alps and surrounded by imposing mountain peaks this resort is beautifully situated on Lake Bled. To one side there is Bled with its fine hotels, to the other a medieval castle towering on a rocky mountain precipice above the lake. We take long walks along its shore and climb steep mountain trails.

BACK HOME

On my return to Hamburg I boast about the marvelous time we had in Hungary. And yet, no matter how well I was received in Cegled and how many mementos of my visit I display in my room, I must own up to the fact that my romance with Hungary was just an escape into fantasy. My real home and those who love me deeply and unconditionally are right here in Hamburg.

Aunt Yvonne, the last of my aunts who still boarded with us, has found an apartment in Barmbeck not far from the school where she teaches. She is thrilled to have a place of her own. Her apartment is very conveniently located for playing tennis, her new hobby, at the nearby Stadtpark. When she does so with her friends I earn a bit of pocket money as a ball boy. I do miss her, but her leaving gives me the chance to have a room all to myself!

For as long as I can remember Aunt Yvonne has been such an important person to me; I can hardly imagine life without her. True enough, I have sometimes resented the discipline with which she supervises my homework. Even now she continues tutoring me at least once a week at her new apartment, located near my school.

My other two aunts who had lived with us during my younger years have long since left the family home. Aunt Marianne's and Uncle Maurus' home is in Cologne; both singers, they are on the road most of the time. Light-hearted Aunt Lotti and her husband, Uncle Edmund, a jurist of very serious disposition, live with their two children in a fine apartment on Ottersbeckallee in Eimsbuettel. I often go there by streetcar to visit them, especially to see my Cousins Wilfried and Uschi. Though they are quite a few years younger, I feel very close to them, like the brother and sister I do not have.

Uncle Edmund, the judge, at first intimidated me with his stern manner and temperamental streak. Now, however, I like and respect him because he is sensitive to my situation as a "Mischling," and I can pour my heart out to him. He was already well advanced in his judicial career when Hitler came to power. Like many intellectuals, he disliked and mistrusted the Nazis from the very start; yet he must reach an accommodation with their new judicial system in order to be able to keep practicing his profession. But in the intimacy of our

Sunday afternoon family circle he makes no bones about how much he detests the farce he has to play to save his career. I need no coaching on the need to be circumspect, both in and away from school, for I have trained myself to avoid all possible conflict. However, with good reason Uncle Edmund keeps lecturing Aunt Yvonne, barely able to contain her hatred of the Nazi dictatorship, on the need to conceal her opposition to the regime.

Among all of my relatives Aunt Erna, Uncle Richard Schmolze and their son Ulli are the only ones who wholeheartedly embrace National Socialism. They see Hitler as the only one able to restore national honor and to lead the fatherland to a bright, glorious tomorrow. Defeated in the World War of 1914-1918, Germany had to accept the humiliating terms of the Treaty of Versailles which impoverished it by imposing huge war reparations. In 1923, the runaway inflation stripped people of their savings and gutted the economy. The following decade brought misery, heavy unemployment and political turmoil. No wonder that Adolf Hitler, a shrewd, ruthless and charismatic politician, seems to countless Germans the nation's savior.

Morale has undeniably risen, not so much as a result of the Nazi's incessant barrage of propaganda and patriotic pageantry, but because millions of formerly unemployed are for the first time in years finding work building apartment complexes, factories, Autobahn highways and Volkswagen automobiles. Many have reservations about the Fuehrer's dictatorial methods but are willing to go along and see whether he can make good on his promises. He is hated by those who see him as a dangerous, fanatical demagogue, who reject him on ideological and civil rights grounds and, of course, those who are the target of his racial persecution. All dissent is relentlessly crushed. Stories abound about people who, arrested and sent to a "KZ" (concentration camp), were never heard from again.

Uncle Richard is, we have heard, very active in the Party, and so is my Cousin Ulli. He is said to lead a local chapter of the Hitler Youth in Meiningen, in the province of Thuringia. During my childhood days we were great pals; now, attending a Hitler Youth rally in Hamburg, our former closeness and our family ties are forgotten. To the family's displeasure he refuses to shake my hand and to speak to me. Oma and Opa consider his behavior toward me a

personal affront which they will not tolerate. They take him to task, stating categorically: "If you cannot treat Harry decently and with the respect you owe him as your cousin, there is no place for you under our roof!" Ulli leaves our house in a huff. How proud I am of my loyal and honorable grandparents!

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Dr. Josef Goebbels, as the Minister of Propaganda, is always at work to mold the opinions of the masses and to whip up enthusiasm through any means: books, newspapers, broadcasts, plays, art, Wagnerian operas, banners, grandiose architecture and rallies. The most colossal of these are the Party Congresses held in Nuremberg where the Fuehrer incites his rapt followers to ever greater sacrifices for the sake of the fatherland.

The official newspaper of Hitler's NSDAP is the "Voelkischer Beobachter" (People's Observer). Being the voice of the Party, the nation's newspapers must quote or reprint its lead articles and editorials. Posters intended to influence the masses scream slogans from every wall. "Blut und Boden," abbreviated in jest "Blubo" (blood and soil), implies that people of the Germanic race must honor and be ready to defend their native soil with their blood. "Mutter und Kind," shortened "Muki" (mother and child) encourages couples to produce more pure-blooded children to strengthen the master race. "Volk ohne Raum," (people lacking space) emphasizes the need for more "Lebensraum" (living space), meaning that Germany is too small for its large and growing population; it must therefore conquer additional territory. "Heute Deutschland, morgen die Welt!" (today Germany, tomorrow the World) is a call for national aggrandizement. "Juda verrecke!" means death to Judaism. "Volk ans Gewehr!" (people to arms) incites militarism. These slogans would be laughable were it not for the threats they imply.

More and more business establishments display at their doors the sign: "Juden ist der Zutritt verboten," (admission forbidden to Jews). "Dieses Geschaeft ist judenfrei!" (this business is free of Jews). This sign is posted at businesses whose Jewish owners emigrated or were expropriated.

Central to the Nazi ideology is, of course, the doctrine affirming the superiority of the Nordic or Germanic race as the "Herrenvolk" (master race). Blacks and gypsies are inferior, Jews at the bottom of the racial hierarchy. Mixing of races is an affront to racial purity called "Rassenschande" (defiling the race), severely punishable under the Nuremberg Laws. Through evil Marxism and capitalism, Jewry is seen as conspiring to control the world by unleashing the scourges of inflation, depression and unemployment. The glorification of racial purity, starkly contrasted by vilifying all that is Jewish, stares one in the face everywhere, through street banners, vicious cartoons and diatribes in the newspapers.

ITALY

Last year's visit to Cegled has heightened my desire to meet my father who lives in Genoa, Italy. Now fifteen years old, I feel the time for it has come. So far I have received an occasional snapshot and exchanged a few letters with him, especially after I met his family in Hungary. I hope I can persuade my grandparents to let me visit him during my next summer vacation. They are noncommittal on the subject; could it be that they fear that such a visit might alienate me from them? Who knows whether they will come around and let me have my way. The only one who is mildly receptive to the idea is Mutti, so long as I hold off until summer vacation. But that is still months away, and I am in the doldrums with school where some of the teachers and students make my life miserable.

From my trip to Hungary I have a valid passport, and there are roughly 100 marks in the savings account which Aunt Yvonne opened for me three years ago on my twelfth birthday. I inquire at the Dammtor Station about an express train to Genoa and find that one is leaving every evening at 19 o'clock. After a few days of intense soul searching I decide to force the issue, to leave home for Italy next Friday rather than doing the sensible thing and wait until the summer break. Mutti usually sides with me but I know that even she would oppose my plan as irresponsible. There is no one I can take into my confidence.

I pack a light suitcase and hide it in the bushes of our front yard. With apprehension I step up to the teller window at the savings institution and withdraw 90 of the 100 marks. The railroad ticket costs close to 70 marks. I know and am sorry that my disappearance will upset everyone terribly. To reassure them that I am safe, I am putting a note in Mutti's bed so that she will find it when she goes to sleep. It says:

"Don't worry about me. I am all right. You will be hearing from me within 24 hours. Love, Harry."

Feeling guilty but also tremendously energized I take the streetcar to the station and board the carriage marked Genoa on the evening train to Basel. The ride takes twenty-four hours. There are few people in my compartment. I tell the lady next to me that I am on my

way to visit my aunt in the Black Forest. I travel all night but am unable to relax. Leafing through an Italian phrase book which I just bought at the station's newspaper kiosk I learn a few stock phrases. At daybreak the train reaches the Swiss border at Basel where it stops for 45 minutes. I use this layover to send two telegrams which I have drafted up. The first one is to poor Mutti in Hamburg; it reads:

"Passing border en route to Genoa to visit Father. Please forgive me. Love, Harry."

The other one, addressed to my father, says:

"Mr. Imre Szanto, 58 via Assarotti, Genoa - Am coming to visit you. Please pick me up tonight at train station at 21:30 hours. Love, Harry."

As the train passes the Swiss Alps the views are indescribably grandiose; they keep me spellbound despite my bad conscience and the fears that torment me. In early afternoon we reach the Simplon Pass, and when the train crosses the Italian border at Dommodossola, it changes the locomotive and the crew. I buy some provisions from a vendor and change the few remaining marks to Italian lire. As we continue to speed through the countryside toward the city where I am to meet my father, really a perfect stranger, it suddenly hits me how insecure and alone I am here in this foreign country, unable to speak the language, virtually penniless, exhausted, hungry, feeling like a fugitive after having run away from home and skipped school.

The compartment was until now almost empty, but then four or five rough-looking young workers enter. They are taking swigs from large straw-covered Chianti bottles which they are passing around. They seem offended when I refuse their invitation, start teasing me, reach for the name tag on my suitcase to see where I am from. They scare me with their evermore boisterous talk and rowdiness. Or is it the stress that is catching up with me? I am now becoming almost panicky and throw myself at the mercy of a kindly old conductor who passes through the train. He evidently senses my fear even though I find it hard to make myself understood. He takes the troublemakers to task and waves me to follow him. I am grateful that he escorts me to the conductors' service compartment and motions me to make myself comfortable. Another conductor is there working on some paperwork. Their clean-cut, mature looks and their neat uniforms make me feel safe for the remainder of the trip.

The more the train nears its destination the more nervous I become, anticipating the important encounter that awaits me in Genoa. When the train pulls into the station I lean out of the compartment window, anxious to recognize my father from photos I have seen, but in vain. All around me high-spirited Italians are hugging and kissing their family members and sweethearts. Little by little the platform empties and here I stand alone. Could we have missed each other or did he perhaps not want to meet me because he disapproved of my untimely visit? What am I to do?

Fumbling in the Italian phrase book for a few fitting expressions I check my suitcase at the station. Then I board the tram that the conductor tells me will take me to Father's address on via Assarotti. Along the way I watch the unfamiliar street scenes, the wide squares and crowded sidewalk cafes. I am much taken with the tall palm trees everywhere which I have never seen in my native Hamburg. A fellow passenger signals to me where to get off, and I walk up via Assarotti, looking for the house number. It is night time but the streets are well lit, and I locate number 86 without difficulty. It is an enormous six-story apartment building; the front door is locked and there is no bell. I don't know Father's apartment number; all letters to him had been sent simply to his street address. It is going on 23 o'clock, too late to start asking for him in this enormous building. Though I am dead tired I will just have to keep moving until daybreak.

The boulevards and coffee houses are emptying as the clocks of the many churches strike midnight. I walk along the now-deserted streets and empty plazas, past shuttered stores, museums, palaces and monuments. Occasionally a straggler hurries by, his steps echoing in the night. I dread the somber figures of beggars and vagrants crouching in the portals of churches and doorways. My unease grows as I reach the harbor area where large steamers cast their somber shadows, and fishing boats clatter at the moorings. I force myself to be brave and march on; suddenly a voice sternly commands me to stop. It is one of "carabinieri" policemen who patrol Italian cities in pairs. We do not communicate well with each other, but I show them my passport and the envelope of one of my father's old letters with his address on it. They seem to understand my predicament and walk with me to a nearby police station. I mistakenly assume that they will let me stay there till morning. Instead, another policeman drives me

by police cruiser to a hotel on piazza Corvetto, around the corner from via Assarotti, and instructs the night clerk to give me a room for the night. Since I have no money he insists that I give him my passport as security. Exhausted, confused and disheartened, I bed down at 2 o'clock on Sunday morning to an uneasy sleep.

The loud tolling of bells from a nearby church awakens me. I get up quickly and just gulp down a glass of water instead of bothering to figure out how to get breakfast. I must accomplish my mission to find my father. Via Assorotti is around the corner and number 86 just a block away. It is about 8:30, and this time I find the large wooden entrance door to the building open. To the left I see a glassed-in concierge loge but a sign in the window reads "chiuso" (closed), probably because it's Sunday. There is a wide circular staircase, lit from above by a multicolored glass skylight. Two tiny elevators, reminding me of bird cages, whisk people at great speed up and down. I don't know the apartment number and there is no directory. Since the concierge is off duty I have no choice but to ring door bell after door bell, inquiring about my father.

I take one of the elevators to the top floor and work my way down. There are ten apartments on each floor. I feel like an intruder and am full of trepidation, but what choice do I have?

"Per piacere, abita qui il Signor Szanto? (please, does a Mr. Szanto live here?"

"No, mi dispiace!" (no, I am sorry).

So far only annoyed or indifferent looks and head shakes. Finally on the third floor a stout, motherly-looking older lady opens the door, gives me a curious, encouraging look when she hears me inquire about Signor Szanto, and asks:

"Lui e suo padre?" (is he your father)?

I nod and evidently look perplexed that she guessed our relationship at first sight.

"Molto simile, lo stesso viso," (great similarity, the same face), she says with a warm smile and bids me to enter:

"Avanti, per piacere!" (come in, please).

She knocks at one of the doors, and when after a while a voice faintly answers "avanti," she motions me to step in. The man lying in bed of this modestly furnished room stares at me in disbelief, calls my name, jumps up, embraces me and sobs tears of joy. He is unable to

compose himself, holding me close in his arms. Frankly, his uncontrollable stream of tears makes me a bit uncomfortable. True enough, we have exchanged some letters in recent months, and from photos I have an idea how my father looks. However, awaking this stranger abruptly from his sleep, unshaven and groggy, is a very different first-time meeting than I had pictured in my mind.

"Didn't you get my telegram from Basel?" I inquire, speaking German.

"No, darling. Emilio, the doorman, gets all the mail and telegrams, and he is off duty Saturday afternoons and Sundays. How sorry I am; you must have felt terrible that I didn't pick you up. I had no idea you would be coming so soon. Weren't we talking about you spending your summer vacation with me in June?" he says.

"Yes. But I just couldn't stand waiting that long. That's why I ran away," I confess.

"You mean that Mutti didn't know what you were up to?" He looks shocked.

"No, no one knew, but she knows now. When I sent you my telegram from Basel, I also sent her one to let her know that I was on the way to seeing you."

Now I understand why the landlady recognized me as his son right away. Standing side by side and peering into the mirror over the washstand, even I am struck by the resemblance between us, just that Father doesn't have much of his blond hair left. What an experience this is for me! I was used to life without a father, yet suddenly there is this smiling, excited stranger, my father, and I even resemble him strongly! And I call him Father! This will take some time getting used to!

I sit down on the chair facing him, now seated at the edge of the bed, and we talk and talk. There are so many questions, so much to explain. He wants to know about my life with Mutti, my grandparents and Aunt Yvonne, and especially how conditions in Hitler's Germany affect me. I, in turn, am eager to learn all about him, his travels, his life in Genoa and his work. For the first time I wonder how I will fit into his existence.

He tells me that he works as a ticket agent in the passenger department of the Cunard Line. It sounds like a modest job, probably paying barely enough to live on. The office is about ten minutes

away on foot. Here in Italy the black-shirt Fascists worry Father. Ten years earlier than Hitler, Mussolini had been enthralling the crowds with heroic oratory and grandiose party rallies. For now, Fascism seems less threatening to Jews than Nazism. So far, little has been done to fan racial hatred, and Jews live their lives unmolested. But this may change, and Father thinks of moving to Paris where he has spent some of his earlier years, for he considers France safer than Italy. Eventually he hopes to return to New York; he had lived there until the stock market crash when the depression drove him back to Europe.

After a quick snack which takes the part of breakfast, Father walks with me to the hotel and pays my bill. We then go by tram to the railway station. From the post office in the lobby Father sends Mutti a telegram confirming my safe arrival, also assuring her that I will write her soon.

"Let's take a ride up the Righi Mountain," he proposes. "The funicular leaves a few block north of the railroad station."

"What is a funicular?"

"Oh, it's like a cable car, but it runs on tracks."

Of course, I am delighted with the idea. It's a fine way to view the whole city from up high! The long anticipated meeting with my father turned out so differently from the way I had imagined it; but now I am happy to be with him. Here in Italy there is so much color and animation everywhere, and people have a lightheartedness unknown to us in Germany. The funicular ascends smoothly on its tracks; it rises above picturesque apartment houses with laundry drying on clothes lines from windows and balconies. The views from the top of the mountain over the city, the port and the sea below are spectacular. Father points out the important landmarks: the Cathedral of San Lorenzo, the medieval church of San Donato and the many aristocratic Renaissance palaces. Ancient walls and fortifications surround the old part of the city, and in the harbor there is a constant coming and going of pleasure and fishing boats. We enjoy the sights while having lunch at a little cafe. Having my father by my side I feel welcome, safe and comfortable in this city where last night I had felt so forsaken.

In town we pick up my suitcase at the station and return home. Father introduces me formally to his landlady, Signora Gianna, who

this morning had recognized me right away as his son. She is very charming and lively. Father had already told her that his son, raised in Germany, might visit him during summer vacation. She seems pleased to see me and puts a folding cot for me into his room. In fact, now is a good time for me to have a siesta, to catch up on the sleep I have missed all these past few days. After I awake Father takes me on a walk around the neighborhood and shows me where everything is located: the bakery, the grocery store and the public market, closed today. There is also a tobacconist's store; a plaque over the entrance displays a large letter T. Father does not smoke, but he explains to me that this is where, besides bus tokens and postage stamps, tobacco as well as salt, both state monopolies, are sold. Since I must learn how to get around town while Father is at work, he teaches me to recognize the various banknotes and coins so I can go shopping on my own.

Today is Monday, a work day, and we both get up early. Signora Gianna has two additional tenants. Since there is only one bathroom for the whole apartment, one must rush in as soon as it becomes available. One of the tenants is Signor Burger, a Hungarian ship broker. Though he and my father are countrymen, Father does not hold him in high esteem. He thinks that he is involved in shady deals, especially insurance scams. What really annoys him is that he leaves the bathroom sink in disarray and full of black hair. Nonetheless, they treat each other politely. I like Signor Burger because I can speak German to him. The other tenant is a reserved Scandinavian gentleman who, judging from the number of empty Chianti bottles outside his door, particularly appreciates this aspect of Italian life.

Father introduces me to Emilio, the surly concierge who now sits in his loge wearing a dark blue uniform and cap. Sure enough, here is the telegram which I had sent from Basel two days ago. For breakfast Father orders a cappuccino and a pastry at the corner coffee shop; I am fascinated by the large, gleaming coffee maker which hisses and blows steam while making its brew. I take my pastry with a glass of milk and trudge along with Father to the splendid old "palazzo" (stately building) in which the Cunard Line has its office; then I return to Signora Gianna's.

Back in our furnished room I settle down by the window. It faces a high wall surrounding a convent; tall acacias raise their graceful

heads on the other side. Hidden from sight I hear the soft murmur of a fountain. I reflect on what to write to my dear ones in Hamburg, how to justify my irresponsible action. Did I do what I did to get away from the repressive life of Hitler's Germany, because I hated school and the taunts to which I was exposed? Was it the strong desire to meet my father or simply my uncontrollable longing for adventure? Eventually my thoughts are taking form, and my letter home is a humble, rueful plea for forgiveness. I seal the envelope, buy a stamp at the tobacco store with the big T over the entrance and throw it into the mailbox at the nearby post office. In a few days Mutti, my grandparents and Aunt Yvonne will receive it and know how much I love and miss them, no matter how badly I behaved.

How weary I always was at school of the heavy dose of Latin grammar and the long sentences in Julius Caesar's Bellum Gallicum (the Gallic war)! I would never have imagined what a lifesaver my knowledge of Latin, so similar to Italian, might some day be for me right here in Signora Gianna's kitchen, in the streetcar or the produce market. I spend some of my time studying Italian; for practice as well as company I visit the Signora or tag along with her when she does her daily shopping. She tells me that Italian kids call their fathers "babbo" and suggests that I call Father by this name, but it sounds too strange to me.

Aside from acquiring some notions of Italian, to do something useful I teach myself typing on Father's tiny portable Hermes typewriter. Opa and Aunt Yvonne's influence in taking long walks is paying off as I tirelessly explore Genoa's wide piazzas and avenues, stately palaces and churches on foot. I am especially fond of those narrow, picturesque alleys and courtyards in Genoa's old quarter near the harbor.

Among my favorite places is the public market near home where row upon row of stalls is laden with fruit, vegetables, meat, fish, poultry and flowers. Vendors are hawking their wares with abandon and haggling with housewives. The scenes, sounds and smells are powerful. One minute a hen at the poultry stall cackles in its cage; the next, chosen by a customer, the vendor chops off its head, yanks out its innards, plucks it, and it is ready for the pot. I enjoy shopping for eggs, bread, sausage and fruit.

One afternoon I go to the Cinema Rialto to see a Laurel and Hardy movie. It has barely gotten dark when the man next to me starts fondling my bare legs; like German boys of my age I am wearing short pants. I have never experienced anything like this before and, repelled and with my heart pounding I change seats. But the man is undeterred and follows me, carrying on ever more brazenly. My afternoon spoiled, I flee the theater in disgust. I keep this experience to myself, for if I tell Father about it he surely won't let me roam the city on my own any more.

Weekdays we take our main meal at "Pensione Palermo" at 12:30 during Father's two-hour lunch break on the third floor of our building. Fifteen to twenty boarders gather here for a tasty lunch served family style on one long dining room table. My arrival is met with surprise and curiosity; everybody treats me, Signor Szanto's teenage son, most cordially. Since the same guests meet here every day, they chat and joke with each other like old friends.

Evenings we feast on cold cuts, cheese and fruit in our room, preparing tea and occasionally scrambling eggs on the kerosene stove. Signora Gianna allows us to store a few perishables and wash our plates in the kitchen.

On weekends we frequent different "ristoranti." Father studies the menu and does the ordering; there are so many unfamiliar dishes to choose from. I am not fussy but cannot understand why, when ordering a "bistecca," they serve just a slab of meat without potatoes and vegetables; these must be ordered separately. Father appears very pleased to have me with him but we both realize that I must soon return to school and an orderly family life.

At night Father socializes with a group of Hungarian emigres at a sidewalk coffee house in the heart of town; he proudly introduces me to his friends. Most of them speak some German and at first I am the center of attention. But soon the novelty wears off and they go back to chatting only in Hungarian, leaving me feeling isolated. Today Father has invited an Italian lady friend called Vittorina, a translator of English and French, to meet me. She is gracious, distinguished and very Mediterranean-looking with long black hair. Once Father turns his attention again to his fellow Hungarians, Vittorina and I don't find a great deal to talk about. Though I have studied English and a little

French at the Johanneum, now when I need it I remember hardly anything.

In place of the full six-day work week the government has reduced office hours on Saturdays until noon. With great pride they call it "Settimana Fascista" (Fascist week), giving the Party credit for the shorter working hours which are now common in many countries. Father devotes his free weekends to me to make up for the long hours which I am spending on my own during the week. I love to hear him tell me about the many places where he has lived, working in foreign trade in London and Paris, with the Guarantee Trust Bank in New York, and managing a hotel in Palma de Mallorca, on the Balearic Islands. He writes to Grandmother in Hungary, asking whether she might perhaps like to visit us to get to know her newly-discovered grandson better.

Today, almost two weeks after I disappeared from home, I finally receive the long-awaited response to my letter of apology. It is written by Oma; she is not gentle with me and chastises me for having run away so irresponsibly in the middle of the school term. She wants me to come back right away and work hard to make up for the school work I missed, so I won't have to repeat the school semester. She has covered up for me as best she could at the registrar's office, explaining that I am recuperating at the Bad Wildbad Spa from a case of bronchitis. I am touched by my family's loyalty, and Father agrees that I should return to Hamburg within two weeks at the latest.

Grandmother Szanto's visit is a big event for both her and us. She is a real homebody and has never been farther from Cegled than Vienna, and that only on the occasion of her honeymoon. So this trip to Genoa is the farthest and most tiring one she has ever taken. All her life she had wanted to see the ocean, a big dream for someone from a small provincial town in land-locked Hungary. We pick her up at the railway station where she arrives with a large, old-fashioned wicker suitcase. It is full of Hungarian delicacies: goose lard with truffles, two paprika chickens, giant salami sausages and an assortment of delicious Hungarian pastries filled with poppy seeds and chocolate. Since the trip took so long the chickens must be eaten right away before they spoil. For several days a veritable Hungarian feast replaces our usual lunch at the pension. Father gives up his bed

for her, uses my cot, and Signora Gianna allows me to sleep on the small sofa in the hallway.

On Sunday we take Grandmother by train to fashionable Rapallo where elegant hotels overlook the beautiful bay. Another day we visit Nervi, a turn-of-the-century resort with splendid sea views, palm-lined avenues and tropical parks. She is thrilled with all these wonderful sights, wants to see the ocean every chance she gets, but tires easily of walking. When Father is at work I go with her by tram to the beach, but after just a short walk along the Lungomare shore promenade I must flag down a cab to take us home. After a week she gets homesick and is grateful when we take her to the railway station for her return to Hungary. It was very nice of her to come all this way and it meant a lot to all of us.

We follow the international news with great concern. In Spain the bloody Civil War has raged since 1936, and last year's attack on the defenseless Basque town of Guernica by German dive bombers, killing indiscriminately women and children, became a symbol of Nazi brutality. Now with help from Hitler and Mussolini, Franco's insurgents are gaining the upper hand in Spain. In early 1938, Austria's fate hung in the balance until in March German troops crossed the border, staging this country's "Anschluss" (linkage) with the German Reich. Now, emboldened by his success in Austria, Hitler is stirring up trouble with Czechoslovakia. He seeks to annex the Sudetenland, a part of Bohemia, supposedly to protect the ethnic Sudeten-German population. The threat of war grows daily. Is there no way to keep Hitler's quest for power and domination in check?

It is high time for me to return to Germany and get on with my studies, otherwise I will flunk this next to the last school year at the gymnasium. As a "Mischling" higher education leading to a profession is beyond my reach; therefore, we all agree it will be best for me to look for an apprenticeship with one of Hamburg's many companies in foreign trade. Father shares my view that there is no future for me in Germany. He wants to help me and Mutti leave as soon as possible once he feels more secure about his own future. He weeps as we part at the railway station, and we wave to each other as long as we can still see one another while the train pulls out on my journey back to Germany, the country I both love and hate.

Obviously I cannot expect a hero's welcome after the worry and aggravation I have caused my family by acting so irresponsibly; I therefore return to my grandparent's home with apprehension. Their feelings were at first badly hurt; however, now they are so happy and relieved to have me safely back with them. The recriminations and the punishment I had feared fail to materialize. I am cramming day and night to make up for the time lost. Fortunately my friend and classmate Guenter lets me borrow his notes and helps me catch up with what I have missed, especially in math. So with his help and Aunt Yvonne's coaching, and working extra hard, I squeak by without losing the term.

HIGH TIDE OF ANTI-SEMITISM

Countless German Jews, until recently successful and respected citizens of their communities, have emigrated. Others are desperately trying to do so, among them are our former family doctor, Dr. Boehm, and our next-door neighbors, the Gottgetreus in whose house I used to come and go for as long as I can remember. The German quota for immigration to the U.S.A. is over-subscribed for years ahead. Which countries are prepared to accept so many refugees?

Nowadays, Jews are being deprived of their most basic human and citizenship rights. Not only are they denied admission to public places, restaurants, theaters and concert halls, but they are even forbidden to own a simple radio receiver. Jewish doctors, dentists and lawyers may no longer practice their professions except to serve Jewish patients and clients. Emigrants must turn all items of value over to the state, especially jewelry, furs and art objects. According to the latest decree, the identity documents of Jews will be prominently stamped with the letter J. All men whose first names are not typically Jewish must add the name Israel, women the name Sara.

By now a majority of German Jews would like to start a new life elsewhere, though many are not prepared for living abroad. Others still regard the Nazi harassment a temporary aberration and refuse to accept that Germany, the country of their birth, a "Kulturland" (country of culture), will continue its present mistreatment.

Yet, as if to prove them wrong, on November 9, 1938, the regime unleashes the most brutal pogrom of all, later called "Kristallnacht" (the night of broken glass). In Paris a Jewish youth assassinated an official of the German Embassy to avenge the deportation of his parents. The Nazi leadership uses this event as a pretext to strike a long-intended blow against German Jewry, to seize their wealth and their businesses. Synagogues are desecrated or burnt throughout the country, Jewish stores and homes looted and set on fire, defenseless people beaten, deported, even killed. These crimes are often carried out by Party goons dressed as civilians rather than in Nazi uniforms, to make it look as though it were the people seeking revenge for the Paris murder.

Hamburg is spared the most vicious attacks on homes and synagogues, but scores of store windows are smashed in the inner city's main shopping district. On our street only Altmann's stationery store is ransacked, but on the Grindelallee and on Hoheluftchaussee several shops lie in ruin. The ultimate insult is that the government is levying a fine of one billion marks against the Jewish community as punishment for the trouble and the disturbances they are accused of having provoked.

Never before has my family, like many other decent Germans, felt such a deep sense of shame and revulsion at the barbarism which the regime has unleashed against helpless fellow citizens of Jewish ancestry.

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The members of the Mewes family, though nominally Lutheran, have not attended church services since their youth. This, and the liberal atmosphere prevailing in Hamburg probably account for the fact that, like many other young people of my generation, I have not been baptized. Sixteen is the normal age for confirmation, and the family considers it a good idea to have me first baptized, then confirmed. It may some day help me prove that I was brought up in a Christian environment, for "first degree Mischlings" who are raised in the Jewish faith are considered Jews. Oma, therefore, speaks to Pastor Friedrichs of the nearby Sankt Andreas Church, and on the following Sunday he baptizes me in a simple ceremony at the end of the Sunday service. Aunt Yvonne is my godmother and Petsch my godfather. Like other young people of my age, I now attend confirmation class for ten weeks, and on April 2, 1939, I am confirmed in the chapel of the pretty red brick church. My black confirmation suit, a gift from Aunt Yvonne, is my first one with long trousers; it makes me feel grown up. Petsch marks the occasion by giving me a beautiful gold ring with a carmelite stone. With the date and his name engraved, it is meant to be a lifelong memento.

I love listening to Petsch and Opa, both free-thinkers, discuss lofty subjects, philosophers like Schopenhauer, Nietsche, religion or the meaning of life. I am not insensitive to the mystique of the church environment, but what moves me more than anything else about

church is the glorious sound of organ and choir music, especially Bach's incomparable toccatas, fugues and oratorios. Sitting in the chapel during confirmation class I am thrilled by the beautiful organ music in the background; after class I climb up to the balcony to watch the organist play. When he calls out "who is there?" I realize that he is blind. I explain to him why I am there. He invites me to sit next him on the organ bench and, sensing my utter fascination, he patiently explains to me how the registers work to produce those sublime sounds. Young and very friendly, he is married to a lady who is partially sighted; they make a touching pair. Though the confirmation class has ended I still visit him and admire his artistry. In his modest, gentle way he helps me deepen my understanding of church music, especially for the organ which I love so much. I also gain an understanding of what it means to live without sight.

SKILLS FOR TOMORROW

Now sixteen years old and considering my special situation, it is decided that I should seek to acquire some practical business skills at one of Hamburg's many firms in the foreign trade field. The counselor at the "Arbeitsamt" (labor board) thinks that finding a company willing to offer me a normal three-year apprenticeship would be hard. He instead recommends that I look for an opening as a "Volontaer" (unpaid trainee). Foreign students and others interested in learning a trade often start in this capacity rather than under a rigid apprenticeship contract. He issues me an "Arbeitspass" (work passport) which everyone employed in Germany must present to his employer. In it the company name, job description, salary as well as hiring and termination dates are recorded.

Weeks go by with only two referrals, a steamship line and a warehousing company; both decide in favor of other applicants. My friend Petsch is the controller at the forwarding company J.F. Reimers A.G. The manager, Friedrich Goehring, is a friend of Mutti's whom she calls Friedel. With only four employees on the payroll, his firm would be much too small to provide a suitable training ground for me. But Friedel has a lot of connections in the business world and he promises to help.

He made some inquiries and I am to apply at a large forwarding firm, Speditionswesen Otto Bensel A.G. The manager, Herr Reifegerste, at first glance intimidates me because of his typically Nordic-Aryan looks which I have come to fear since I cannot help associating it in my mind with the Nazi racial stereotype. Yet I could not have been more mistaken. Though tall, blond and handsome, he receives me with warmth and fairness. He understands my predicament and concludes the interview by saying: "Though we can take you only as a "Volontaer," we will do all we can to give you the same thorough training we give to all of our apprentices." I start on the 15th of the month.

Among the first with whom I share the good news is my father, to let him know that I am just stepping onto the lowest rung of my business career. I remember him telling me that, fresh out of school in Hungary, he also trained with a Hamburg firm as a "Volontaer."

However, to my bewilderment, my letter, addressed to him in Genoa, is returned marked: "Left, no forwarding address given." That probably means that he carried out his plan to move to France. I remember that he had felt uneasy about the growing displays of anti-Semitism in Fascist Italy. Sure enough, soon Mutti receives his letter from Paris where he is just trying to get settled. It contains interesting descriptions and postcards, making Paris instantly the latest city of my dreams.

To help me make a good impression on the job Opa passes down to me one of his grey herringbone suits. Herr Schrader, the family tailor, alters it to suit me, turning it inside out. Fresh out of school, I find it thrilling to ride the streetcar crowded with formally dressed business people, past city hall up the stately Moenckebergstrasse. The office is located in an attractive brownstone building. Like many Hamburg commercial buildings, it has an unattended elevator of the type called "Pater Noster," so named since it runs uninterruptedly like beads in a rosary. There are two elevator openings on every floor; to the left the cars go up, the right down, one following the other in an unbroken chain. One must step on and off quickly since the cars never stop. Missing the top or the ground floor doors, the "Pater Noster" elevator carries one, with a loud thumping rumble around a giant cogwheel in the dimly lit basement or attic, an unusual sensation.

The company employs roughly forty people, quite a few of them apprentices. They learn the forwarding business over a three-year period, earning little more than pocket money. Though I am a "Volontaer" I appreciate that the company treats me, as the manager had said, like one of them. Every Tuesday morning at eight o'clock Herr Schneider, the wiry old controller, assembles us eager rookies for a two-hour company training session. In addition, one afternoon a week apprentices attend a state-run trade school that teaches them office skills, arithmetic, geography and related subjects. Herr Reifegerste suggests that I go along with the others unless the school rejects me. The labor board mandates that apprentices be rotated to a different department every four months to provide them with well-rounded business skills.

I am assigned to the domestic railway freight forwarding department headed by Herr Schultz and staffed by his secretary, three

clerks and two apprentices; one of these is Walter who is proud to show me the ropes. There is a pecking order among us "Stifts," the nickname given to apprentices in German. The most recent rookie gets to do the lowliest chores: cleaning up messes, packing and carrying cartons to the post office and messengering. All letters to foreign destinations must in wartime be censured; therefore, one of my jobs every afternoon consists in carrying large bundles of unsealed envelopes with letters and shipping documents to the censorship office for inspection. Since the third-year apprentice in Herr Schultz's department has just been drafted, I am called upon to do part of his more advanced work: typing business forms and bills of lading, checking freight tariffs and presenting documents to customers and banks. I love my new work.

At school politics and racial status had always mattered. Here at work I use the Hitler salute with just that handful of employees who wear the Party insignia. Otherwise the atmosphere is relaxed and people mind their own business. I try my best to blend in and do what is expected of me. So far all goes well.

There are a number of young ladies working at the office, some of them very pretty. I admire them secretly from afar, especially sweet-faced Fraeulein Karsten from the international department. But I make sure to keep my fascination to myself, knowing full well that girls are taboo for me under the Nuremberg Laws.

I consider myself lucky that Walter, to whom I report, is a nice chap, easy to get along with. When the weather is fine we sit outside on a bench by the fountain and eat our sandwiches. There is always a lunch time crowd: office workers relaxing in the sun, couples absorbed in each other, hawkers demonstrating the latest household gadgets. On Tuesday noon I rarely miss the wonderful organ recitals at nearby Sankt Petri, the venerable old Gothic brownstone church with a tall, oxidized copper-clad steeple. The power of those mighty organ works elevates and grips me, giving me the peace and strength I so badly need.

Petsch's office is a few blocks from mine; occasionally he invites me for lunch at the vegetarian restaurant at Alster-Arkaden, other times to watch after work a nature or travel movie at the Urania Palast. Mutti and her friend Sonni sometimes take me along on excursions to Blankenese by the Elbe River or to the picturesque

Alster Valley. Years ago when I got a bicycle for my birthday, Sonni had shown the patience to teach me to ride it after Mutti had given up on me. Last Saturday evening he borrowed his employer's car and took Mutti and me for a drive to the scenic Sachsenwald Forest. There, in a clearing we watched by moonlight a herd of deer. On the way home our headlights accidentally blinded a magnificent stag. It stood in the middle of the road, paralyzed by fear, unable to move until Sonni switched off the high beams.

Aunt Yvonne, a true nature lover, takes me on long hikes or bicycle rides, our unpredictable weather permitting. She is outraged about the events that took place during and following the Kristallnacht and shows great sensitivity for the plight of her few remaining Jewish and half-Jewish students. Many are anxiously waiting to get their visa applications approved.

Since Opa's dental practice is in Harvestehude he always had many Jewish patients. He just cannot understand how Germany can treat its Jewish citizens so shabbily. Occasionally he receives letters from former patients who now live abroad, even as far as Shanghai and South Africa. He reads excerpts from them to some remaining Jewish patients who would like to emigrate if they had the chance.

WAR

There seems to be no end to the Axis Nations' aggression. The West's hope that the Munich Agreement, concluded in September of 1938, would appease Hitler, proved false. He now forces Czechoslovakia to surrender Bohemia and Moravia to Germany; the Duce, in turn, seizes Albania. Daily our newspapers are filled with reports of Polish provocations toward ethnic German minorities and threats against the people of Danzig. On September 1, 1939, we sit by the radio in our office as Hitler, amid military fanfare, announces he has ordered the invasion of Poland to safeguard German interests and to reunite the city of Danzig with the Reich. The Wehrmacht (German army) advances rapidly as Polish resistance crumbles; a new expression is coined: "Blitzkrieg" (war at lightning speed).

Bound by treaty obligations with Poland, two days later France and England declare war on Germany, starting a new world war. Within weeks the Soviet Union, linked to Germany by a non-aggression pact, attacks Poland from the East, and the aggressors are quick to divide the spoils among themselves. Our newsreels show the severe punishment which the Polish army, out-manned and out-gunned, as well as Polish civilians, are sustaining.

Until now Hitler has achieved all his objectives by intimidating a world adverse to war: rearmament, totalitarian rule and racial terror, an anti-Western alliance with Italy and Japan, military intervention in Spain to help Franco defeat the Republican loyalists. Above all he declared the hated Versailles Treaty null and void and annexed Austria, Bohemia and Moravia. His attack on Poland left England and France no choice but to declare war on Germany.

Poland's defeat in just eighteen days fills German hearts with pride in their fighting men; however, none but the staunchest Nazi hawks welcome the war which Hitler is precipitating against the Western Alliance. The bitter memories of Germany losing the Great War are still fresh in people's minds; it ended barely twenty-one years ago with an enormous toll in human lives and suffering. Now Hitler plunges the world into a new conflagration, a total war, bloody and merciless. However, once war has begun and soldiers are fighting

and dying for their country, people set aside political dissent. They unite behind the national cause: My country, right or wrong!

Men from all walks of life are being recruited for military service. The streetcars and sidewalks in the heart of Hamburg are filled with young draftees and soldiers reporting to their regiments, hurrying to the Central Railroad Station. A formation of Polish prisoners of war, tired and dispirited, is being led in the opposite direction to help construct air defense bunkers. All over town the parks and the roof tops of public buildings are being equipped with platforms for flak anti-aircraft batteries. Soon they will be ready for action.

For us civilians air raid protection has become a priority; our family attends civil defense drills at my old grade school. Everyone is issued a gas mask and instructed how to use it. They show us how to make sturdy window blinds from black construction paper and how to install them at nightfall. Herr Moeller, the electrician from the next block, seems to relish his new authority as an air raid warden. He enforces the curfew rules rigidly and fusses when just the slightest glimmer of light is visible from outside, especially on those pitch black, moonless nights. Even cars and trams have their headlights dimmed to render them invisible from the air. So far the air raid alerts just awoke us from our sleep but, thank God, no bombing attacks followed. Even so, the wailing of the sirens in the middle of the night sounds ominous and unsettling. A warbling sound means "alert," a steady single tone all "clear." Many a night's rest is ruined by false alarms, but we are relieved when the R.A.F. has other targets in mind.

Herr Moeller inspected our cellar the other night with a couple of civil defense officials; they designated the maid's room to become our air raid shelter. So far we have equipped it with discarded furniture, a water pitcher, a first aid kit and several blankets, for the cellar is dank and cold. We have our doubts how safe our shelter really is: on the plus side its ceiling is vaulted, giving more strength in case of a hit or collapse; but we worry about the small window which opens toward the backyard. For the time being we have shored it up with several layers of sandbags. We also sealed the doors and windows with rubber molding, in the event of a gas attack. We understand that the civil defense department will reinforce the ceilings with strong

wooden beams, a steel door and window in place of the wooden ones; we just have to await our turn.

The black-outs make walking on the streets difficult, particularly when there is no moon to guide us. However, this does not keep people indoors, for life must go on. In fact, after a few minutes in the dark one's eyes adjust and one develops night vision like a cat. Petsch complains that people keep bumping into him when he is out at night; therefore, he wears iridescent badges on the lapels of his coat to make himself more easily visible in the dark. We have several small flashlights but are not supposed to use them except in emergencies, otherwise we get into trouble with the civil defense wardens.

Rationing coupons are issued for most food items, and people line up in front of bakeries, grocers, butchers and wherever food and tobacco are sold. Even to eat in restaurants requires coupons: 100 grams of meat, 10 grams butter, 25 grams flour, 25 grams sugar and so on. No one is starving but food occupies more and more of people's minds. Real coffee, tightly rationed, has become a precious commodity, reserved for special occasions. For every day people drink "Ersatz Kaffee," (substitute coffee) a bitter and unappetizing brew made from chicory.

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Aunt Marianne has a long engagement in Munich in the Johann Strauss operetta "Die Fledermaus," and Mutti visits her for a few days in the Bavarian capital. While there she is intrigued by a classified advertisement soliciting an experienced milliner in the small Bavarian town of Laufen, bordering on Austria. Taken with its charm and the majestic view of the Alps in the distance, she accepts the offer on impulse. She would like me to spend the Christmas holidays with her. I ask Herr Reifegerste to excuse me for a few days and, after a whole day on the train, reach the sleepy little town. Mutti and I share the tiny room she rents from Herr Mosbacher, the local carpenter. I bed down on the sofa, with my head right under the Christmas tree, beautifully decorated in my honor. Early in the morning Mutti takes pleasure in showing me the picturesque town, covered with fresh snow. The swift Salzach River separates Laufen from the small

Austrian town of Oberndorf, the birthplace of the beloved Christmas song "Silent Night, Holy Night." Crossing the narrow bridge leading to the Silent Night Chapel, we hear and watch the ice floats break and crunch under the force of the river's powerful current. The chapel, simple and graceful, is being readied for tonight's midnight mass.

Returning home we share lunch with the Mosbachers. For the holidays the butcher sold Frau Mosbacher calf's liver, one of my favorites, giving her three times the quantity shown on the meat rationing coupons. What a windfall! The Mosbachers, father, mother and two little girls, wearing colorful local costumes, are friendly but shy with strangers. I have a hard time understanding their Bavarian dialect; it is so different from the German spoken in Northern Germany.

Bavaria is one of the most strictly Catholic parts of Germany. In every room of the house there is a wooden crucifix, a picture or a statue of the Virgin and Child. Our hosts begin each meal with a blessing and a prayer. In fact, Frau Mosbacher, as is the local custom, attends mass at 6 o'clock every morning, rain or shine, summer or winter. Her husband is an expert carpenter and makes exquisite furniture. He has not only carved all the many crucifixes in the house, but he also builds the coffins needed in the nearby cemetery. As much as we admire his artistry, it makes us a bit uneasy when, oil lantern in hand, we walk from the dining room to our modest quarters, crossing the unlit storage room stacked high on both sides with caskets.

The peaceful, snow-covered streets of Laufen resound this Christmas Eve with the joyous sounds of children caroling, accompanied by trumpeters. We return from town to our cozy room, heated by a potbellied stove. Instead of skirting the cemetery we walk right through it; the deep snow crunches under our boots. As we pass the small chapel, peering through the large window built for paying the last respects to the dead, we see the body of a Polish prisoner of war lying in state, his four-cornered military cap resting on his chest. How sad for his loved ones, no doubt praying for his safe return from captivity! Peace on earth! Good will to men!

*****

On my return to Hamburg there is a letter from Father. To my great surprise the envelope has a Spanish stamp and return address on it. He writes that since Hungary supports the Axis powers, the French considered him an enemy alien and refused to renew his residence visa. He has, therefore, moved to neighboring Spain, the only country that imposed no entry restrictions. He did so knowing he was entering a country just emerging from three years of civil war and ruled by Franco and his far-right Falange Party. In his younger years Father had spent two years in Palma de Mallorca; there he had developed a genuine liking and respect for the Spanish people, their language and their culture. Denied Paris as the city of my dreams, now it's "Espana" for me!

*****

This is the coldest winter in memory and the Alster Lake is frozen solid. Young and old are crossing it on foot, for the novelty of it or as a short cut on the way to work. The ice pack supports even heavy trucks.

My room is unheated; Aunt Yvonne left me her portable kerosene stove, but there is no fuel to be had. The frost creates fanciful ice flower designs on the double window panes, and these mornings the water in the wash basin is covered with a thin sheet of ice. When it is that cold, getting out of bed requires real determination.

With immediate effect all men working in the office buildings of the inner city must perform civil defense duty. This means sleeping every tenth night on a bunk bed in the building's air raid shelter, along with three colleagues of my firm. Everyone dislikes this duty; especially the married men hate leaving their wives and children alone in these uncertain times. Here at the shelter I meet high and mighty Herr Kessmann, our vice-president, Egon, a customs department clerk and Rudi, a lowly apprentice. In normal times we would be unlikely roommates, but this is war and duty calls. According to regulations, when an alert is sounded, we are to take up positions in the attic to fight any fires caused by incendiary bombs. Equipped with shovel, pail and ax, we are to cover the bombs with sand and carry them on our shovel down to the street. How easy, harmless and unrealistic this all sounds!

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My versatile Uncle Maurus, in peacetime an opera singer, has, since he holds a degree in medicine, been drafted into the army medical corps. Uncle Edmund, a justice at the Hamburg superior court, has received his induction notice as a military judge. Like so many wives whose husbands are away at war, Aunt Lotti dislikes having to raise her two children, my Cousins Wilfried and Uschi, by herself.

The special bond between Aunt Yvonne and me is as strong as ever. She has always encouraged me in my studies, exposed me to the wonders of nature and the arts. During these cold winter months and due to the hardships of war she cannot always be with us on Sundays; but I see her regularly at her cozy little apartment in Barmbeck. Though a neat homemaker, her living room floor is always piled high with her students' English and French composition books. During my visits we usually discuss the latest Nazi outrages, the grim war and her school problems. Her principal keeps lecturing her that, as a teacher, she owes it to the Fuehrer and fatherland to join the Party. Her refusal is bound to hurt her chances of advancement. Considering her education, years of experience and excellent performance, a promotion is long overdue but, under the circumstances not possible. Joining the Party to advance her career, so common these days, is unthinkable for a person of her integrity. Yet to avoid serious trouble she must conceal her hatred of the regime and avoid speaking out against it in public; this is very hard for her to do.

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Last fall Poland was defeated and the Allies declared war on Germany. Where will fighting erupt next? For a good six months all is deceptively calm. Is it the quiet before the storm? On April 8, 1940, to the sound of military marches and with bulletins from the Fuehrer's headquarters blaring from every radio, we learn that our troops are marching unopposed into peaceful Denmark. As they push further north into Norway, fighting erupts and intensifies, with battles

between German and British naval vessels, but before long Norway also falls under the control of the Reich.

A month later, Hitler's armies, under cover by the Luftwaffe (air force), smash into Belgium, Holland, Luxembourg and parts of France. It is amazing how fast and decisively the Wehrmacht in this repeat "Blitzkrieg" once again defeats its enemies, nearly driving the British into the sea in a hurried evacuation from Dunkirk. Outflanking the Maginot Line, thought impregnable, within days the swastika flag flies over Paris. On June 22, Germany and France conclude an armistice at Compiegne. Hitler insists, in an act of symbolism, on it being signed in the same railroad car in which Germany had surrendered in 1918. "Deutschland ueber Alles!" Piling victory upon victory, German military might appears unstoppable on land, air and sea. Excited by these victories, the nation follows breathlessly the war bulletins. There are flags in the streets, and patriotic fanfare is everywhere.

With France defeated and the British evacuated from the continent at Dunkirk, Hitler sounds surprisingly conciliatory towards Britain. Could peace be near, we wonder? But Winston Churchill quickly lays this illusion to rest, rousing his people instead to great sacrifices to save England and crush Hitler's might. Now the air waves resound anew with the Fuehrer's threats, this time to invade England. Every day there are glowing reports how our valiant Luftwaffe is shattering Britain's defenses. It is sparring with the unexpectedly tough and effective Royal Air Force for control of British air space. On the seas German submarines seek to isolate the island nation by sinking a great many vessels sailing for England. Massive German bombing missions against the very center of London provoke painful retaliation. To Field Marshall Goering's embarrassment and Germany's great shock, the R.A.F. stages its first, very destructive air raid against the German capital.

Once again our air raid sirens sing their doleful song, rousing us from our first sleep. Opa has, as he often does during alerts, taken down the blinds from his bedroom window, and I stand next to him in the dark, waiting for the fireworks to begin. From all corners our powerful searchlights scan the night sky for the intruders. When an enemy bomber is caught in the beam, a second searchlight reaches up from afar, and between them they lock it like a small silvery moth

into focus. Then the flak anti-aircraft guns all around us aim a deafening barrage of fire at it. This time, instead of the few incoming bombers to which we were accustomed, the sky is filled with them and the angry roar of their engines. We hurry down the staircase to the air raid shelter; yet even before we reach it the battle in the skies above us begins. Load after load, the bombers unleash their deadly cargo with piercing screams, followed by shattering detonations that shake the ground. Our defending flak cannons add to the bedlam, attempting to drive away or shoot down as many intruders as possible.

We all draw close together in our shelter, exchanging anxious glances, shivering from fear and cold. Just when it seems that the attack is over a new wave arrives and the battle resumes, with hits sounding ever closer. At long last the roar wanes and the steady "all clear" signals the end of the raid. Stepping out from the shelter into the front yard the sky is flaming red from the nearby fires. Our maid Leni and I walk half a block along our debris-strewn street. Three apartment houses on the corner of Grindelberg and Hallerstrasse are fully engulfed in flames. The bombed-out residents and their neighbors look glumly on, for nothing can be done to save their homes and belongings. The corner apartment house where Herr Schrader, our tailor, used to have his workshop, has also gone up in flames. Half a block farther are enormous craters where several stores and a fine restaurant used to stand. Tonight's bombing was devastating, striking closer and hitting harder than any previous one. Later we learn that the worst damage was done to the harbor where row upon row of warehouses fell prey to the flames.

Tonight has shown how terrible it is to lose everything; we feel very grateful to have escaped unharmed. How different this is from reading war reports about distant enemy lands! Now we take air raid alerts seriously and scramble for shelter as soon as the sirens sound.

Instead of attempting to invade Britain, as many had expected, the Luftwaffe keeps unleashing more terror attacks on London and other English cities. Whole neighborhoods are burned to the ground. As casualties mount and the population seeks refuge in underground stations and air raid shelters, retaliatory R.A.F. air attacks on our cities intensify. This new form of war against civilian targets in England and Germany grinds on, endlessly dealing death and destruction.

BARCELONA

From afar Father has been watching the developments with alarm, and his letters speak of his concern for us. He knows that I would like to get away from the Nazi's reach and, if possible, emigrate with him to America even though chances for this seem slim for now. A friend from Genoa, working in the steamship business in Barcelona, helped him find a position with the United States Line in this city. Father inquires whether I would like to come and live with him in Barcelona, as a first step on the road to America. This opens up the possibility of putting behind me my precarious situation in Germany; of course, I could never leave Mutti behind. Thus emerges the plan that first I will join Father alone, then she will be following me later. Oma and Opa consider the idea hazardous, but they will not stand in our way; Aunt Yvonne and Petsch feel it is worth trying. So it is decided that I will leave Hamburg in early December, 1940. To the consternation of my colleagues and the displeasure of the company's management, I give Otto Bensel A.G. my notice.

Again my path leads me first by train to Italy, well remembered from my youthful escapade to Genoa. This time I interrupt my trip to Rome for two days in Milano to visit Father's childhood friend, Tibor Racz, a lawyer from his hometown in Hungary; he lives there with his delightful Italian wife, Gina. Instead of being lost like I had been in Genoa, what a pleasure to have them meet me like old friends at the Milano railway station and welcome me warmly! Tibor recognizes me right away as a younger version of my father. They entertain me well for two days and show me the famous sights: the Scala opera house, the magnificent Duomo cathedral with its marble spires, the Galeria Vittorio Emmanuele and other Milano highlights. The time in their company and at their tiny apartment passes quickly. Father has asked Tibor to buy me an airline ticket to Barcelona and give me enough lire to see me through my short stay in Rome. Alitalia has two flights a week from Rome-Ostia to Barcelona. Waiting for the next flight will give me a chance to get to know the Eternal City.

Though war has not stopped at Italy's borders I see little evidence of the country being at war except for the blackouts at night and the large number of soldiers everywhere. The Italians appear to me now

as interesting, spontaneous and colorful as I remember them from my visit to Genoa. My curiosity how people live in other places makes me an enthusiastic traveler. I savor the sense of adventure, looking forward to a few days in legendary Rome on my way to Spain where my father is expecting me. Who knows what the future holds in store for us all?

I am excited and full of anticipation as the train pulls into the enormous Rome-Termini Station. Suitcase in hand, I walk through the darkened streets in search of a place to stay for the next two nights. The Pensione Fiore on the third floor of a neat, modest building on a quiet street near the station is just what I am looking for. After freshening up, I find myself at the family-style dinner table, surrounded by congenial strangers, sipping red wine with my meal.

In the morning, with a city map in hand, I explore as many of Rome's timeless treasures as are nearby and as I am able to admire on a short winter day. I stand in awe on the Capitoline Hills in front of the ancient equestrian statue of Emperor Marcus Aurelius. Below me is the venerable Forum where emperors were crowned, Julius Caesar was deified, and edicts were pronounced which shaped the Roman Empire and the ancient world. Beyond it is the Colosseum, that awesome amphitheater in which, to the roar of the multitudes, daring gladiators fought wild beasts. Wherever I turn, there are the silent reminders from this great city's ancient past, among them the perfectly-preserved Pantheon, a temple built to honor all the gods, later dedicated as a Christian church. Never before have I so much appreciated my grandfather's admiration for this ancient civilization, its heroes and its language. Some day I must return to Rome to do justice to its many wonderful sights, spend several days exploring the Vatican instead of the much-too-short visit I am paying to Saint Peter's Basilica. But now off to Spain!

To my surprise the aircraft for Barcelona is a small hydroplane that accommodates barely twenty passengers. After some coughing and sputtering while warming up, the twin engines settle to a steady hum once we are airborne on this my first flight, and I watch the coastline below disappear. At first hitting the air pockets makes me nervous, but soon I love soaring high in the sky, now flying over sparsely-populated, mountainous Corsica. After two hours we descend into Mallorca's peaceful bay of Pollensa. It is jarring when

the hydroplane hits the sea, raising large plumes of water. Father had talked with fondness about the years he spent in Palma de Mallorca years ago, and I hope to be able to visit it with him some time. Many of the Italian passengers, probably vacationers, are staying here. We all disembark and go through Spanish immigration. A light lunch is served at the small airport restaurant while we wait to take off on the last leg of the journey. The plane fills with local travelers bound for Barcelona, just half an hour's flight. I smile shyly at a beautiful Mediterranean lady sitting next to me, traveling with a French passport. I realize that with my school-English, a mere smattering of French and no Spanish at all, I am poorly equipped for the international scene, especially for Spain. As I ponder my deficiencies the small hydroplane splashes down in the port of Barcelona on the afternoon of December 3, 1940.

It seems like landing in a war zone. To my shock the reminders of the battles fought here during the Civil War are still all around the harbor: hulls of sunken ships, overturned cranes and bombed-out wharfs. I should have remembered that just a short time ago Generalisimo Franco's Nationalists defeated the Republican government after three years of bloody fighting. The Civil War, which Franco's Falange Party calls the "Glorioso Movimiento Nacional" (glorious national movement) has cost Spain a million lives and left the country impoverished.

Our plane is tied up at a makeshift pontoon pier, and I immediately spot Father searching for me among the passengers emerging from the small aircraft. He waves to me, but before I reach him my elegant neighbor, to his surprise, greets him cordially, and they start chatting in French. Then he hugs me and introduces me to Odette, an old acquaintance of his from the days when he lived in Palma de Mallorca. With a twinge of jealousy and inadequacy I realize that I have a lot to learn from Father, not only Spanish, but also how to deal with the fair sex.

Father lives in a furnished room overlooking the Rambla de Cataluna, a beautiful, wide boulevard right in the heart of Barcelona, with the silhouettes of the buildings on Plaza de Cataluna in the background. Unfortunately, the room is too small, particularly since I have joined him and Mutti is expected soon. We will have to start looking for more suitable accommodations now that Father is

becoming a family man. I am excited to be here with him and we have a lot to talk about, for so much has happened since we took leave from each other in Genoa two years ago. Now I am seventeen, more grown-up than when I had run away from home and school, yet the situation hasn't changed all that much: again we live in very modest circumstances, Father has to leave me alone while he goes to work, and I must study hard to learn a new language, Spanish, to be able to fend for myself.

As we are talking, Father's older brother, my Uncle Pista (Steven), whom I have never met before, bursts upon the scene to meet me. Unlike my German Uncle Maurus, successful both as a doctor and an opera singer, Pista appears torn between two conflicting goals: to sing opera or to practice law for which he was trained. Away from his homeland, with both ambitions beyond his reach, he supports himself as a language teacher. He is in Barcelona for only two months substituting at the local Berlitz Language School. Then he intends returning to the school's headquarters in Madrid where he will work until he receives his visa for the U.S.A. Right now he is on a short break between two classes. In his forties, Uncle Pista is good-looking despite his receding dark blond hair and stocky built. He is very animated, yet his joviality seems to hide a somewhat superior and mocking streak. A reputation to be a ladies' man has preceded him, and I can see how his wit makes him a charmer. Though likable I don't quite know what to make of his theatrical ways.

We walk him back to school, just a few blocks away. We cross Plaza Cataluna, the main square of the city, and Father shows me the Ramblas, Barcelona's wide and lively boulevards. Day and night they team with people strolling to and fro while others watch the scene from the many sidewalk cafes. True to its name, the Rambla de la Flores (boulevard of the flowers), is ablaze with flowers of every variety and color. At the foot of Rambla Santa Monica stands the statue of Christopher Columbus atop a tall column, pointing toward the sea and the New World still to be discovered.

West of the Ramblas is the Barrio Chino (Chinese quarter), so named because one might imagine this maze of narrow, twisting streets to be an old helter-skelter Chinatown. The winter days are short and the streets dimly lit. Most people are poorly dressed, a sign of the hard times Spain is undergoing. Local men wear the traditional

black berets. We enter the small restaurant where Father usually eats his supper; it is fragrant with the scent of spices. The owner, Don Pablo, greets us at the door and recites, without prompting, the two or three specials of the day, for there is no printed menu. Even I can tell that he speaks Spanish with a heavy Catalan accent. This somewhat coarse-sounding language is spoken by the people of Barcelona, to the displeasure of the Spanish government which fears Catalan separatist tendencies. Father orders dinner for both of us, "albondiga" meat balls with lentils. Like the other guests, we have the wine that is included with the meal, welcome liquid nourishment in these lean times. We foreigners drink it from water glasses, but the locals deftly do so from a "purron," a gracefully shaped glass decanter. They hold it in the air about a foot above their heads, letting the wine pour in a fine stream into their mouths without spilling a drop. Food is scarce, especially bread, meat, rice and potatoes, all strictly rationed. After dinner, heading home, I marvel at the number of people on the "ramblas" and at the sidewalk cafes along the way.

When we reach our apartment building Father claps his hands and yells "sereno" (watchman). By age-old tradition residents do not have a key to the gate door of the building in which they live; opening the heavy doors is the duty of city-appointed "serenos." This gives them importance, for they know the coming and going of all who live in the neighborhood. The government is said to enlist these night watchmen, when expedient, to spy on people's private lives. After Father repeats the clapping two or three times, from afar the "sereno" strikes the pavement with his staff and shouts in acknowledgment "voy" (coming). Carrying a heavy ring with many enormous gate door keys on it, he fumbles for ours and opens the heavy wooden door. Since there is no electric light in the staircase, for a tip the "sereno" lights and hands us a small candle, to last just long enough till we reach our apartment.

Father talks to me seriously about my new host country and warns me never to discuss politics with strangers, for today's Spain is a repressive right-wing dictatorship. Franco's Nationalist army and his Falange Party have come to power with the help of Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany which supplied them with armament and air support. For this help Franco, called the "Caudillo," (leader) is much in Hitler's and Mussolini's debt. So far he has resisted his Nazi and

Fascist allies' pressures to draw Spain into the war; he argues that his country needs peace to recover from the ravages of the Civil War. However, Franco's sympathies rest squarely with the Axis powers, and their strong influence makes itself felt in the press and in all aspects of life. Yet he cannot afford alienating the Western democracies, for Spain depends upon their much needed economic help, especially for vital commodities like grain and petroleum. Considerations such as these appear to keep Franco from attacking British-controlled Gibraltar, long a thorn in Spain's side.

Barcelona's streets look peaceful and serene but the jails are overflowing with political prisoners. Torture and summary executions of "los rojos" (the Reds) are said to be commonplace to settle old scores dating back to the days of the previous Republican Popular Front government. I had not fully known these realities before I joined Father; they come as an unwelcome surprise and prove that I have not really escaped Hitler's sphere of influence.

There are constant reminders of how totalitarian Franco's regime is. Every day at noon all traffic downtown at the Rambla de las Flores grinds to a halt. Loudspeakers blare from roof tops and balconies the two national anthems, the old one of the monarchy followed by the new one of the Falange Party. All pedestrians must stand at attention, raise their right arm in the Fascist salute and sing both anthems. Offenders risk being arrested and hauled off by the ever-watchful Guardia Civil (a tough national police corps). Not only does Franco's picture appear on all postage stamps, but to mail a letter the envelope must be prominently marked "Viva Franco - Arriba Espana" (Long live Franco and Spain), otherwise the post office cannot forward it.

Like most newcomers I am here on a temporary visa; it must be renewed every 120 days at the police precinct. After waiting in line for hours I get my passport stamped, receive my "cedula personal" (identification card) and, most importantly, my food rationing coupons.

Except for the political heavy-handedness and the food scarcity I love Barcelona and its surroundings, its people, the cosmopolitan life style and, in sharp contrast to Northern Germany, the sunny skies. Nonetheless, I do feel homesick for my family and for Hamburg and

worry about the war. Hopefully it won't take long before Mutti will join us.

I have lots of time on my hands and use it to explore on foot all parts of the city within reach, particularly the old Gothic Quarter; it extends from the waterfront to the old San Francisco cathedral. Parallel to our street, called Rambla de Cataluna, runs the elegant Paseo de Gracia, on which Gaudi's "art nouveau" apartment building called "La Pedrera" (the stone quarry) is located. Its design suggests a sea-worn cliff, with ornate iron balconies surrounding it like kelp. The famous Catalan architect Gaudi also built, but failed to complete, Barcelona's distinctive landmark, the fanciful modernistic "Sagrada Familia" (Holy Family) Cathedral. For a bird's eye view of the city Father takes me by cable railway to the Montjuich Castle. The view from here soars from the Tibidabo Hill in the north to the waterfront in the south. As a reminder of the bombings by the Italian Air Force, a demolished cable car, which used to transport visitors from the castle to the breakwater, still dangles aimlessly in midair over the harbor basin.

When alone I spend hours studying Spanish with the help of my Langenscheidt grammar book. The Latin, over which I had sweated for years in school, is of great help. Even my limited knowledge of French and Italian comes in handy. Father can only do so much to help me, but Uncle Pista has a splendid offer. Nowadays, interest in learning German is at an all-time high, for people are sure that Germany will win the war. One of my uncle's fellow Berlitz teachers, Jose Mora, is studying German. He would be interested in giving me a hand with Spanish in exchange for my coaching him in German, since the pronunciation is such a tongue twister for Spaniards. The school is just a few blocks from home, and so from time to time I meet with Senor Mora between lessons in the teachers' lounge. This helps both of us a lot, and tutoring gives me a new sense of competence and authority.

Sure enough, Father and Uncle Pista again frequent a circle of Hungarian emigrants just like in Genova. It meets at the elegant sidewalk cafe named Diagonal. While they chat with each other in Hungarian, foreign to me except for a few words and expressions, I watch the lively street scene and indulge myself in "horchata de chufa," a milky-looking drink made from pine nuts.

The members of the Hungarian circle closely follow the war news and world events, for all of them have a lot at stake. The British have just defeated the Germans at Tobruk, Libya. Will Franco make a deal with Hitler to allow German forces passage through Spain to Gibraltar to gain control over the Mediterranean? There is fear that Spain might join the Axis powers in the war.

Father's friends at the Diagonal Cafe, most of them Jewish, have fled either Hitler or Mussolini. They are here either in transit to somewhere else or hope to be able to wait out the fall of the right-wing dictatorships, to be able to return to their homelands and get on with their lives. Any deal made by the Fuehrer and the Caudillo would end their safe haven. There is great concern how deeply the Gestapo is entrenched in Spain, and the degree to which the Guardia Civil does its bidding. Just a few weeks ago they arrested, for unknown reasons, a fellow Hungarian Jew, and nothing has been heard from him since. It was not the first time that it happened; incidents like this make everybody cringe. In general, Jews have so far gone unmolested in Spain, though German influence and propaganda is everywhere; in fact, right in front of the coffee house a newspaper boy noisily hawks the Spanish edition of "Adler," the German air force magazine. "Compre la revista alemana Adler." (Buy the German "Eagle" magazine).

Most of these Hungarians eke out precarious existences in one way or another through poorly paid office jobs or by teaching languages. Others simply live off their limited savings. The exception to this cramped lifestyle is Bela Weiss, a textile engineer from Budapest. Young, tall, debonair, always with a twinkle in his eyes, Bela lives with his glamorous, stunningly beautiful wife Ilonka in a luxurious apartment on the fashionable Paseo de Gracia. His skills are much in demand by the local textile industry, in fact he manages a textile mill in Sabadell. Though I can't understand what he says to his countrymen in Hungarian, it is obvious that he is very clever and entertaining, spreading good humor whenever he is around. Father sometimes gives me a thumbnail translation of his amusing stories and anecdotes. To avoid being overheard by possible spies when discussing politics and personalities, Bela amuses his friends by calling Stalin in Hungarian "big mustache," Hitler "small mustache" and Mussolini "no mustache."

At times Bela and Ilonka entertain their friends of the Hungarian circle at their apartment. Since they live in modestly furnished rooms or cheap boarding houses, they are awed by their rich friends' stylish apartment and luxurious lifestyle. In the old country they all came from comfortable family backgrounds, with servants in their homes, but here it causes a sensation that Bela and Ilonka employ a Spanish live-in maid.

As Mutti is about to arrive we are looking for larger accommodations. To rent and furnish an apartment of our own is out of the question. Therefore, we consider ourselves lucky to find a large, cheerful room with two beds and a tiny den with a cot for me at Senora Pla's apartment on calle Enrique Granados. She is an effervescent platinum blond war widow in her late fifties, proud to be Catalan, a chubby little lady full of vitality and with a heart of gold. She keeps sharing with us anecdotes and folk wisdom in her irrepressible good humor.

Senora Pla supplements her small pension by renting out rooms of her apartment including board. At night, sharing the dinner table with her and her son Jose Maria, a lieutenant in the Spanish army, we are all one happy family. Her cuisine is undistinguished but we cannot hold that against her. Food these days is scarce and of poor quality: the milk is watered down, the bread barely fit for human consumption, the cooking oil smells to high heavens, and so it goes. We turn our rationing coupons over to her and she does the best she can with them. All cooking at her home and throughout the city is done on tiny charcoal stoves; they not only smoke up the apartment but expose one through the ventilation shaft of the five-story building to the cooking odors from all neighboring kitchens. Father and I find this particularly trying on Fridays when most local housewives prepare the offensively pungent "bacalao" (dried codfish) for dinner. But one has to make allowances, and we consider ourselves lucky to have in Senora Pla a warm, motherly and true friend.

Once in a while there is a special treat, if one can pull it off. Uncle Pista was able to buy some rice and sugar on the ubiquitous black market called "estraperlo." Using real milk, raisins and cinnamon, his latest Czech girlfriend, Margot, made wonderful rice pudding from it. Today, Sunday morning, before leaving together for the beach, they share this rare treat with us; we partake of this feast

huddling together in secret in our room, exchanging sly, guilty smiles with each other.

Uncle Pista, a big flirt, appeals to women of all ages and nationalities. He entertains them with tales of his presumed successes and operatic past; he serenades them and knows how to flatter their vanity. Though I don't believe half of his stories I cannot help being envious of him and his many conquests.

The train to Castel de Fels, a resort on the Costa Brava, is crammed with city folks on their way to the beach. Always ready to burst into song, the Spaniards clap hands in unison and stamp their feet, flamenco-style, even when crowded into these old, rickety railroad cars. Ole! They travel in large family clans: mother, father, children galore, uncles and aunts, the old folks dressed in black. The beach at our destination is quite rocky except right near the water's edge. The families settle down in groups to prepare the traditional "paella" rice in large earthen pots. Eating, drinking, singing and dancing, they forget their sorrows.

The sun-bathers are almost all foreigners. By edict of the Catholic church bathing suits must have sleeves and cover most of the body; revealing too much bare skin is against the law. Most imported suits are considered scandalous. The beach is patrolled by a morals' squad, composed of a Guardia Civil accompanied by a priest. This austere pair stands out in contrast to the merrymakers on the beach as they look for those who break the dress code. One must always be vigilant, for fines are steep and even arrests are made. Therefore, lying on our towels and soaking up the sun, we are watching out for the patrol. When it approaches we cover up with our towels. Pista and Margot meant to go into the ocean just for a short dip since in winter the water is quite cold. Just then the fearsome pair appears and reprimands a lady whom they find too provocatively attired. She gets away with a stiff warning and is ordered to cover up. While they argue at length, Pista, Margot and others with scanty swim suits must stay submerged until the coast is clear. The bathers return from the water numb with cold but quite amused, and everybody has a good laugh.

My Spanish still leaves much to be desired, to Father's chagrin: "But you have been here already two months!" He looks at me despairingly, shaking his head. There isn't much I can say in my

defense except that I don't have anyone to practice with. My occasional sessions with Senor Mora at the Berlitz school help a bit, but he doesn't have time for me as often as I had hoped. The newspaper carries a section with personal ads, and Father approves of my idea of trying to find by this means a Spanish-German language exchange partner. My ad reads: "Young German seeking Spaniard for exchanging bilingual conversation." Of the three replies I received two are from distant suburbs; the third one is written on a business letterhead from a "taller electrico" (electrical workshop); the address is close to Father's office. In Spain it is rare to own a telephone; therefore, it is a welcome surprise that Father is able to phone from his office and make an appointment for me with the writer of the letter, Senor Xavier Velazquez.

I am quite excited as, at the agreed-upon time of the afternoon, I enter the small, orderly electrical shop in an old section of town. Xavier, a trim Spaniard in his early thirties, receives me enthusiastically. He introduces me to his brother Raul, taller and a few years older. Raul is not really studying German, but he likes to stay around out of curiosity and participate when Spanish is spoken. Theirs is a family business, started by their father, a native of Valencia who turned it over to his two sons. Xavier began his studies of German in evening school about a year ago. The German influence is very strong in Spain, and people look upon it as the language of the future. He knows about as much German as I do Spanish, so we are well matched. The brothers' friendly manner gives me confidence, and before long we lose our fear of embarrassment when we mispronounce words or make mistakes. First I speak German to Xavier who finds the pronunciation difficult. Later we switch to Spanish for my benefit. Often we fill gaps in our vocabulary by pointing or gesturing. I am curious about so many things, not only concerning the Spanish language but how Spaniards live and think. The brothers are at times amused by my questions, and we are having lots of laughs. We make a standing date for Mondays and Thursdays at 17:00 in the afternoon, but the brothers encourage me to drop in for a chat at any time I am in the neighborhood. When they have no time for me I look in at the "Fronton" (Jailai) Palace, just two blocks down the street.

I am no sports fan but find this fast-moving, elegant Basque ball game exciting and fun to watch. With long wicker baskets attached to their arms, the players gracefully scoop up the hard rubber ball and hurl it against the wall in the opposing team's field. Back and forth the contest rages; the strong, graceful young players move across the court like ballet dancers.

Father shares Pista's love for opera. Tonight Pista treats us to an outdoor performance of Verdi's "Rigoletto," one of Father's favorites. It is held, of all places, at the Plaza de Toros Monumental, the bullfighting arena facing Plaza Espana, an imposing structure reminding me of the Coliseum in Rome. The set for the opera in the palace of the Duke of Mantua is quite convincing, and the roles of the tragic jester, his unfortunate daughter, the heartless duke and the rest of the cast are well acted and sung. The trouble is that each time the audience begins to lose itself in the performance, it is brought back to reality by the loud snorting of the bulls that shuffle in their pens behind the stage for tomorrow's bullfight. At first we are quite annoyed by the ridiculous competition the bulls are giving the opera singers. However, we do our best to ignore the distraction so it won't spoil an otherwise pleasant evening in a grand setting.

The opera was a bit farcical at the plaza de toros, but bullfighting is indeed taken very seriously in Spain. Not for the faint-hearted, it combines pageantry, grace, valor and gore, deeply gripping the Spanish soul. My new friends Xavier and Raul Velazquez are, like most Spaniards, true "aficionados" (fans) of this national sport. For weeks they raved to me about the exploits of the great "matadores" (bullfighters) Belmonte and Manolete and insist on taking me with them to next Sunday's fight.

Our seats are on the shady side away from the heat and the glare of the sun, and have a great view of the whole arena. The band plays rousing bullfighting music and there is great excitement in the air. After an expectant silence, the commanding sound of a fanfare announces the start of the spectacle, with the grand entry of the whole fighting team, on foot and on horseback. All wear lavishly embroidered costumes and traditional three-cornered hats. They circle the arena in festive procession to the sound of spirited bullfighting marches, stopping in front of the president's loge. With an air of importance the presiding dignitary throws down the key for

the bullpen to the leading "torero," who unlocks it and opens it wide. The bull breaks out from the confinement of the dark pen and charges ferociously into the sunlit arena. It stands there for an instant in dazed fury. A hush falls over the crowd, spellbound by the beast's raw power and ferocity.

The "bandarilleros" enter the arena, goading the animal with brightly festooned darts. They thrust them, after a frenzied pursuit across the arena, into the bull's back, to the roar of the crowd. Then the "picadores" ride in on horseback carrying their lances. They enrage the bull by waving red flags, causing it to attack them and their hapless horses. Though protected by armor, the old mares take a frightful beating and often fall to the ground fatally wounded. By now, perhaps fifteen minutes into the spectacle, the "matador" enters the arena, brandishing his sword draped with a red cloth. With his "muleta" he provokes the bull into charging and attacking him. The "matador" demonstrates his bravery and disdain for the danger he faces by doing pirouettes, kneeling in front of, or turning his back to the raging animal. Twice the bullfighter had to jump over the wooden enclosure that surrounds the arena to escape injury from the menacing horns of the pursuing beast. Each show of bravery earns him cheers and ovations from the frenetic crowd. My friends are ecstatic when the matador barely misses being caught and thrown into the air by the bull's horns.

Finally it is time for the matador to slay the beast with one fierce and skillfully aimed strike of his sword between the shoulder blades into its heart. This is the climax of the fight, triggering wild ovations. A team of horses drags off the bull's lifeless carcass. Then after raking the wood shavings covering the arena, the spectators are ready for the next bull and a fresh team of fighters, six of them in the course of the afternoon.

There is no denying that bullfighting is thrilling, deeply rooted in the country's history, art and folklore. The pageantry is splendid, the music rousing and the bullfighters fearless. Still, it is hard for us foreigners to close our eyes to its cruelty and gore. I thank my friends profusely and pay tribute to the skill and bravery of the matadors. I won't tell them that deep within my sympathies were all along with the animals, painfully sacrificed for the thrill of the crowd. So ends an instructive afternoon during which Xavier and Raul taught me the

rules and vocabulary of the "corrida de toros." On Mondays the city's restaurants feature on their menus "estofado de toro" (bull stew). While bulls are specially bred and well nourished, I suspect that during these years of food scarcity many an old cow may land up in the pot under false identity.

MUTTI'S ARRIVAL

It is a long and anxious wait for Mutti to join us in Barcelona. There are delays and more delays until she gets her documents in order, but finally Father and I are at the airport, awaiting her Lufthansa plane to land. He is smartly dressed and carries a large bouquet of red carnations. I am impatient but sense that he is even more nervous than I am. He and Mutti, after all those years virtual strangers, are now coming together for my sake, and to explore the chances of sharing a joint future, first in Spain, perhaps later in the New World. Father qualifies for a visa to America; for Mutti and me the wait would take years. The aircraft has come to a stop and I see her walking down the bridge in her heavy winter coat, straining to catch sight of us. There are hugs, shouts of welcome and tears of joy. How much I have missed her!

This is Wednesday, and Father has taken furlough for the rest of the week to welcome Mutti whom he calls Trudi, and to acquaint her with the new environment. She is a handsome and youthful brunette and Father compliments her on her good looks. At first there is an awkwardness between them, but soon this initial reserve gives way to greater warmth. Father introduces Mutti to Senora Pla as his wife who has been living in Germany and is rejoining us. The senora cannot do enough to make her feel at home and is very pleased to have such a nice young family boarding with her. Having suddenly a mother and a father like everybody else is a strange experience to me.

The remainder of the week we spend like tourists on vacation. We get up late; the extra rest is most welcome to Mutti after months of poor sleep, interrupted by trips to the air raid shelter. Barcelona, though not exactly balmy, offers a welcome contrast to the cold, bleak Hamburg winter. We take Mutti sightseeing for which she has a genuine passion; everything fascinates her. After long walks Father invites us to one of the many sidewalk cafes for refreshments. One evening Uncle Pista comes over with an Italian girl friend, Laura, to meet Mutti. Another time Father proudly introduces her to his Hungarian friends; they are far more attentive to her than they usually are to me, speaking German to her all the time. Sunday we go by cable car up the Tibidabo to enjoy the magnificent view of the city.

To the northwest we can see at a distance the beautiful Montserrat Monastery. I sometimes leave Mutti and Father alone to give them a chance to reacquaint themselves with each other.

Father is back at work; this gives Mutti and me time to catch up on all that has happened these past few months. By now I feel quite at home in Barcelona especially since my Spanish has improved. I still get homesick for Hamburg and for family and friends, but at least I have Mutti by my side. Yet there remains that awful war to worry about! School children, including my Cousins Uschi and Wilfried, are being evacuated from the exposed Northern cities to the safer Southern countryside.

Paying for small purchases is a real problem these days. People hoard the old Spanish coins that come into their hands rather than circulating them because their copper value is much higher than their face value. The Civil War has ended just a short time ago, and the government has not yet minted enough new coins and bank notes. Therefore, in place of currency people often pay for small purchases with postage stamps; they are virtually in shreds from excessive handling.

In our wanderings about town Mutti and I come upon the site of Barcelona's former World's Fair. It is still impressive though the glamour of flower beds, decorative lights and graceful fountains has disappeared. We are struck by the number of poor women and children carrying containers of food. They come here to help feed the large number of political prisoners, their husbands and fathers, imprisoned in the old Montjuich fortifications; it is rumored that they are starving. To help them survive, their families bring them food which they scrimp off their own meager rations.

Besides the Montjuich Castle that overlooks the port and the city, we also visit the imposing National Palace, the Sports Stadium and the "Pueblo espanol" (Spanish village). Here each region of Spain - Catalonia, Andalucia, Aragon, Asturias, the Basque Country and others - is represented by a structure built in its own style. Artisans demonstrate their peculiar crafts, spinning, weaving, whittling and pottery-making.

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Being a milliner by trade, Mutti loves reading fashion magazines, particularly those that also feature hats. There are several fine ladies stores near home on the fashionable Paseo de Gracia. Mutti considers some of the hats in the show windows appealing but not quite up-to-date; she is convinced that her own models would compare favorably with those exhibited. Father encourages her; they inquire about the prices and find them very high. This gives Mutti the idea of designing her own line of hats. Since Father is at work it becomes my job to help her with this project.

Working in our furnished room or renting a workshop is out of the question. Perhaps Mutti might teach a course in hat making at one of the numerous "Academias de moda" (fashion schools). Some of the owners we have talked to are receptive to the idea.

We come to an agreement with "Academia Pujol," a fashion school operated by a young Catalan couple on Calle Mayor de Gracia. They are convinced that a demand for such a course could be developed. Mutti will teach and demonstrate how hats are made, with me acting as interpreter. This will also give Mutti a chance to work up an inventory of hats which she can sell to the better fashion stores on Paseo de Gracia.

With this goal in mind Mutti reads the leading fashion magazines to keep up on the latest trends. I help her find sources for all the materials she needs: felt, trimmings, notions, and above all a wood working shop to make for her the wooden molds on which hats are pressed. Finally all is set, and her sample collection is much admired.

Father offers some of her creations to fashion stores. Modas Madelaine buys several of them, but unfortunately they pay her only a pittance. Nonetheless, Mutti is thrilled to see her hats displayed in the exclusive show window. We ask Father's elegant Hungarian friend Ilonka Weiss to inquire about the prices; she can hardly believe her ears when the sales lady quotes them at almost four times as much as the shop paid Mutti. The reason is clear: of course it is because they are the latest arrivals from Paris! What a hoax!

Despite the deception, Mutti is happy she made the connection to Modas Madelaine. The owner is a pleasant French lady. When she finds out that Mutti is from Strassburg she introduces her to her seamstress Charlotte who hails, like Mutti, from Alsace. They chat, half in German and half in Alsatian, about their childhood days in or

near Mutti's native Strassburg. We all leave Modas Madelaine as friends and with an invitation to return.

TROUBLE

Father lies in bed with a chest cold and is running a fever. Despite his protests, Senora Pla insists on treating him with a home remedy which she calls in Catalan "lissi," meaning "elixir." She places half a dozen "ventusas" (lit candle stubs) on his back, each covered by a water glass. The suction created by the vacuum when the candle goes out for lack of oxygen is supposed to draw out the cold. We cannot deter her from what we consider hocus-pocus; but to avoid hurting her feelings Father subjects himself to this exotic treatment, winking at us behind her back.

Angelita, the maid, interrupts the procedure, announcing to Senora Pla the arrival of a surprise visitor. Through the open door we catch a glimpse of a young blond woman. She embraces the Senora and hands her a bouquet of flowers. At least this interruption gives Father a welcome rest from the unwanted ministrations. Senora Pla excitedly calls Mutti and me to meet her visitor, "a fellow countryman of yours," as she refers to her. She introduces her as Erika Marti, who works, of all places, at the German Consulate. A former tenant, she used to share our very room with another German lady before she married a Spaniard a few months ago. Senora Pla tells her that we came from Germany to join Father who is Hungarian. Though he is in no condition to receive her, Erika uninvitedly sticks her head through the bedroom door. After exchanging a few words with him she wishes him a speedy recovery. She questions Mutti and me: "Have you registered with the Consulate? Registration is required within two weeks from arrival, you know. Also do join the VDA (Association of Germans residing abroad)! You'll really enjoy their activities," she chirps hypocritically. Then Senora Pla and Erika withdraw to the living room where we overhear them chit-chat and laugh.

After she left we all agree that her smile seemed so insincere and showed such suspicion that we instantly perceive her as a threat. This chance encounter with so menacing a visitor in our very quarters makes us very uneasy. We have carefully avoided contact with everything and everyone German, and now there is this unfortunate breach of our privacy!

The millinery class at "Academia Pujol" has begun. Mutti demonstrates to her students the various steps of hat making. She first explains these to me in German, then I translate her instructions into Spanish, a dictionary by my side. Tending to be shy around young ladies, I need to muster up my courage to address this group of Spanish senoritas: Pilar, Milagro, Luisa and Carmen, all young and pretty. I am especially taken with cute and lively Carmen. From the way she looks at me I have a feeling she likes me too, but I am here for the serious business of interpreting, not for letting myself be charmed.

Our students are at first taken aback that their teacher is such a novice to their country that she needs her son to help out. But the initial awkwardness soon gives way to a cheerful and stimulating international exchange, enjoyable to all. To my surprise the senoritas, not much older than I am, address me in the familiar case "tu" rather than the formal "Usted." Each student selects a hat from a fashion magazine and works at it as her project, with Mutti teaching and supervising every step along the way. We all learn from each other: the girls to make hats, Mutti to teach and pick up some Spanish, and I to become quite fluent in this language. Everybody bursts out laughing when Carmen and Milagro start referring to objects by their German names after having heard them called that way so often.

Two weeks after Erika had dropped in, Senora Pla surprises us at dinner with the question why the Germans are so obsessed with looking for Jews under every bed. When Father shows consternation at her question, she confides in him that Erika had asked her whether he is a Jew, has Jewish friends visiting him, lights candles on Friday evenings or observes the Sabbath. She laughs telling us about this incident and assures us that she answered these questions in all sincerity negatively, but we are appalled rather than amused. For it coincides with another frightening discovery: Father feels sure that he has been under surveillance for some days.

He says he repeatedly noticed a middle-aged man, alone or accompanied by a younger one, watching him from a doorway across the street as he left for work in the morning. Other times they rode the same tram and mixed with the crowd when he had lunch with his colleagues. He met one or the other when he picked up his mail from General Delivery at the central post office. At first it seemed to him a

coincidence, but when he met their gaze at the Hungarian circle there was no longer any doubt about it. Mutti and I, maybe less observant, have never noticed anything like this directed at us.

Perhaps we are gripped by paranoia, but Franco's Spain is a police state where civil rights do not exist. The jails are overflowing, people disappear from view without a trace, and the Guardia Civil is known to work hand in hand with the Gestapo. That is why Father is panic-stricken at his discovery, and so are Mutti and I. We now see clearly that Spain is not the safe haven we had naively expected it to be. And still another blow: when next day we return home, Senora Pla hands us a letter which a messenger from the German Consulate left for us. It summons us to report to a certain Herr Schlueter next Tuesday at 10 o'clock.

We huddle close together in our room and speak in whispers. The scrutiny under which we have come compels us, at least for now, to set aside our plan for a life together. Father feels that there is no time to lose, that he has to leave immediately or risk falling into the hands of the feared Gestapo. He insists he must catch tonight's train for Madrid where his re-entry visa to the United States awaits him at the Embassy.

Mutti helps Father pack his suitcase. He divides with us what little money he has. For the two of us there is barely enough left to live on for three weeks. Will we meet again, when and under what circumstances? We hug and shed some tears. Then we quickly close the house door behind him as he steps out into the night without even taking leave from Senora Pla.

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The elevator takes us much too swiftly to the sixth floor of the Cataluna Office Building where the German Consulate is located. The swastika flag, the Fuehrer's picture and the hated Heil Hitler salute which we had banished from our minds, all intensify our foreboding as we report to Herr Klaus Schlueter at the appointed time. In his office, next to Hitler's picture over his desk there is another one of Heinrich Himmler, Chief of the Gestapo, in black SS regalia. Herr Schlueter, wearing the dreaded SS insignia on his lapel, glumly

motions us to sit down. There is a stenographer by his side to record our testimony.

"You both neglected to register with the Consulate, no doubt for reasons of your own. You appeared here today only because we summoned you. Now, Frau Mewes, tell us about your relationship to Imre Szanto and his present whereabouts."

"He left us last Thursday night. He was very nervous claiming that he was being followed. We bade each other a final farewell. Actually, things between us did not work out as well as I had hoped."

"You mean he left you for good? Where to? Didn't he leave you an address?"

"No, he just said he was going to Madrid to get his American visa. He intends to return to America where he lived years ago."

"Of course, the typical wandering Jew! It must have been obvious to you, Frau Mewes, that he, the father of your son, is Jewish, like the whole Hungarian clique he hung around with at the Diagonal Cafe! We know them only too well. Bad enough that you had a child by this Jew when you were a young girl. But how did you dare take up with him again? Wasn't it clear to you that this represents "Rassenschande," a serious offence under the Nuremberg Law for the protection of German blood and German honor?"

"You are mistaken! Imre is a church-going Catholic; so is his brother Istvan. We have gone to mass together! He is decidedly not Jewish."

"Nonsense! As everybody knows, many Jews seek to hide their true identity under the mantle of conversion, but that is nothing but a facade. It doesn't make them any less Jewish. It does not fool anyone, so how could he have fooled you? You knew this man intimately for years. How could you not have known or been so naive as not suspecting him of being a Jew? You should have known better, investigated. I am told he looks Jewish, and it is obvious that your son does!"

"Harry looks like a Mewes. If you are alluding to his nose, it is similar to my father's, and he is from an old German family, 100% Aryan. I never had any reason to doubt Imre's word. I came here two months ago to see whether things might work out between us, to possibly give my son, born out of wedlock, a father after all these years."

"And you, Harry Mewes, naturally are sticking to the same story," he turns to me. "What do you have to say for yourself?"

How do I deal with his arrogance? I just know that I must avoid provoking him.

"My mother is right. Since early childhood I was told that my father was a Hungarian Catholic."

I wince under Herr Schlueter's glacial stare as he shakes his head in disgust.

"You two are obviously covering up for each other. But we are not concerned with you, Harry Mewes. The guilt lies with your mother for having defied the Nuremberg Laws," he glares at her.

"You will be hearing from me again after it has been decided how to deal with you. Meanwhile you are to remain in Barcelona and keep me informed of your whereabouts at all times. Your passport please, Frau Mewes. Heil Hitler!"

We leave the Consulate badly shaken. What else could we have done but claim ignorance of Father's Jewish background? Yet Mutti and I know only too well that my records in Hamburg document me as a half-Jew. If they dug deep enough, our lies would soon be discovered!

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Senora Pla is very upset by Father's sudden departure; she really adored "Don Enrique," as she called him. Unwittingly she doomed us by introducing us to Erika; how could she have foreseen the consequences! She feels guilty for the part she unintentionally played in the break-up. Even so, as our landlady she can see the handwriting on the wall, namely that without a breadwinner we can no longer afford boarding with her. With the few pesetas earned from the millinery class and from selling an occasional hat we cannot make ends meet.

Without "Don Enrique" it has become very quiet at the dinner table though Senora Pla and her son Jose Maria try to cheer us up. The developments leave her no choice but to advertise in the newspaper for new boarders who are, unlike us, solvent. She assures us that she will always consider us dear friends, and we know that she means it. But our dilemma is: what to do, where to go?

Madame Lebrun, the owner of Modas Madelaine, has heard at the French Club of an unattached French widow who is looking for someone to share her house in the northern outskirts of Barcelona, for safety and companionship rather than for money. She was told that the section was not the best and the house in pretty neglected condition. However, beggars can't be choosers; so we decide to take the tram out next Sunday afternoon to see the lady and look at her home.

An intense woman in her late forties, of slight built and a mane of unkempt grey hair, Madame Carbonell lives alone in this ramshackled house. Her late husband, a wine merchant, had begun building it just before the Civil War on a plot of vacant land, and parts of the interior were not properly finished. For instance, the kitchen and bathroom fixtures were never connected to the water main. Water must, therefore, be brought in by bucket from a well in the backyard. Madame Carbonell tells us, in heavily French-accented Spanish, that she lost her husband and her only son, nineteen years old, during the Civil War. She still tries to operate by herself what remains of her husband's wine business, Bodegas Carbonell, but without him and her son life has lost its meaning and joy. We feel very sorry for her, but being city folks we have misgivings about sharing this stranger's dilapidated home in this God-forsaken suburb.

Since Mutti arrived and with so many things happening, I have sorely neglected my friends Xavier and Raul Velazquez and our Spanish-German language exchange. The brothers understand that I need to devote myself to my mother and no longer depend on them to perfect my Spanish; they compliment me how much it has improved. Xavier misses the help I used to give him; when I tell him that, with my father gone, Mutti and I need to work for a living, he offers to pay me for tutoring him in German twice a week. Encouraged by this I ask Senor Mora, my Berlitz teacher friend, to please put in a good word for me should the school need a German teacher. Uncle Pista has long since returned to Madrid and like Father, left for America.

Senora Pla has found a new tenant and, with regret, serves us notice; of course, we knew all along that this was in the offing. We lack enthusiasm for moving in with Madame Carbonell; however, we really see no alternative. In fact, we ought to consider ourselves lucky that she offered us a room at her home rent-free. Therefore, we

return to tell her that we gratefully accept her invitation and would like to move in next Wednesday, if agreeable. She seems pleased and gives us an enormous, old-fashioned key to the front door of her home. The few other houses in the sparsely-settled neighborhood are also in pretty poor condition, but this little "colonia" (suburb) seems at least peaceful and serene. Who knows, we may in time learn to like it there.

All of our possessions fit into the two suitcases we are carrying; they seem to get heavier during the ten-minute walk from the tram stop to our future home. Since there is no answer to our knock on the door we let ourselves in. Fortunately, there is electricity though the cords are clumsily strung from room to room, dangling in the air. The walls are totally bare; there are neither pictures nor ornaments of any kind. The unwashed dishes piled up in the kitchen sink and the general disorder show that our new hostess is far from being a model homemaker. Our room is sparsely furnished but we will have to make do with it. The large kitchen and the adjoining pantry are in the basement. All cooking is done on a tiny charcoal stove. A row of windows and a splintered, ill-fitting door go out onto a large backyard overgrown with weeds, flowers and bushes. This green wilderness is the only thing we like about our homestead.

To the left of the back door a small cave has been cut into the rock on which the house is built; it is dank and slippery. There is the well from which we draw our water. A coarse rope hangs down to the water level. Keeping all the carafes and pails filled with water becomes one of my most important assignments in our new abode, followed by that of lighting and fanning the charcoal fire in the stove so that Mutti can heat water and prepare meals. Tonight we feast on sardines; tomorrow we will trek to the small general store to buy provisions.

If we plan our chores well we need go into town only twice a week. Senora Pla recently taught Mutti how to prepare "paella" rice, and she plans on trying her hand at making a simple one, containing just a few pieces of chicken rather than expensive sea food. Our hostess is often gone and then we have the house to ourselves.

The millinery class at Academia Pujol continues, but as Mutti is gaining in confidence she needs to rely less and less on me. I teach Xavier Velazquez German and Mutti often helps out sewing at Modas

Madelaine; the extra income is most welcome. Charlotte, lonely without her husband, is anxious to have us meet her five-year-old daughter; we are spending Sunday afternoon with the two of them at her pleasant apartment on Calle Balmes.

We ought to feel grateful to Madame Carbonell for having offered us shelter at her home despite its shortcomings. However, it does not take us long before we come to the conclusion that are paying too dearly for this privilege. At first we got on well enough with our hostess, but soon her self-control wears thin, and now she makes our lives miserable displaying her bad temper, her brooding and nasty, unfair insults. We try to be patient and put up with it, realizing how much she has lost and suffered during the Civil War. It now becomes painfully clear to us that her moods and outbursts are the result of a serious drinking problem. Fortunately she is often away for days which gives us some peace. With nowhere else to go we better develop a thick skin.

Besides the troubles with our landlady, we are engaged in steady warfare with swarms of mosquitos which we can barely keep at bay by spraying clouds of "Flit" insecticide. We also battle veritable armies of field mice that invade the house by night from the backyard, scampering about the kitchen floor. Eventually we succeed in curbing their number by wedging lumber under the kitchen door. The lizards which, attracted by the light, cling by their suction cup toes to the window panes, rather fascinate us. At first we felt repelled by a family of frogs that lives in the cool, moist cave by the well; now that we have gotten used to them we find them charming and regard them as our friends.

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Six weeks have gone by since we were called to the Consulate. Now, full of foreboding, in response to a second summons we face once again somber and imperious Herr Schlueter.

"Any news from Imre Szanto?" he questions Mutti.

"No, we have not seen him since he left that Saturday night, April 19th, the day after his birthday."

"Has he written to you?"

"No. We have not heard from him at all. By now he is probably already in America."

"Frau Mewes, as you know this has been a most unsavory and offensive matter. Now that you seem to have put it behind you, we are willing to give you another chance and to drop the charges against you on condition that you return to Germany and do your part in the war effort. There is a great need for young, healthy women like you, especially in the ammunition factories. This is the least you can do for the fatherland in retribution for your repugnant behavior.

"What about Harry?"

"You know as well as I do that there is no place for your non-Aryan son in today's Germany; so you will just have to leave him behind in Spain."

"I could never do that. He is my only child, too young to live abroad by himself. Even if his father were Jewish, Harry was born and raised by me and my parents in Hamburg. Since my father had only daughters, Harry is the last person of the new generation to bear our family name. I could not look my father in the eye and tell him that I left him behind."

Her voice and demeanor reflect a mother's despair. Schlueter's voice becomes a bit less abrasive.

"I understand how you feel, but there is no choice. Just consider the situation your son would face under the Nuremberg Laws if he were to return with you. As a "Mischling" he cannot serve in the army like other men of his age, and to us he would only present a security risk."

"If he can't return neither will I."

"That is not for you to decide. Don't be obstinate! Go home and get used to the idea! You know that we have ways to make you comply if you will not return on your own accord. Heil Hitler!"

Mutti cannot hold back her tears as we sit down to rest on a park bench facing the building with the swastika flag. "No, darling, I could never leave you behind in Spain," she sobs.

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Now in late June, 1941, German forces are attacking the USSR, Generalisimo Franco's arch-enemy, on a long front from the Baltic to

the Black Sea! Crowds gather around loudspeakers all over Barcelona to listen to the war bulletins, and newspapers are snatched up within minutes. The Soviet-German non-aggression pact which Hitler had signed with Moscow in 1939 was always a thorn in Franco's side. Therefore, Falangist Spain is exuberant that the tide is turning and right-wing armies are at last challenging the Communist anti-Christ Empire.

MADRID

Senor Mora of the Berlitz School leaves me a telephone message at Academia Pujol to see him as soon as possible. When I report to him he informs me with his usual enthusiasm that their school in Madrid urgently needs a full-time German teacher. Senor Vidal, the principal of the Barcelona Berlitz School, had interviewed me before and recommended me to his colleague in Madrid, Senor Bermudez. He voices some doubt whether an eighteen-year-old would make a suitable teacher, but Senor Vidal assures him that I strike him as mature and serious beyond my years. On his recommendation Senor Bermudez is willing to give me a chance and to pay my train fare to Madrid, assuming that I report for work within two weeks. Senor Vidal will confirm this to Senor Bermudez by telephone after I have had a chance to discuss the offer with my mother.

This calls for a fast decision, and it isn't an easy one. It would be my first real job, and Berlitz is a reputable school. Can I leave Mutti alone in Barcelona? Certainly she can't continue to live by herself with that mad-woman! Will she be able to carry on alone with the course at Academia Pujol?

After this latest alcoholic tantrum it is clear that Mutti cannot stay alone at the Carbonell residence. In fact, we will both have to leave her house as soon as possible following a horrendous scene when the police found our hostess delirious by the side of the road. They carried her home, kicking and swearing. She kept up her disgraceful behavior, howling, screaming and insulting us, beating against our door, trying to force her way into our room. We barricaded ourselves against her onslaught by moving the dresser and one of the beds against the door. The delirium spent, Madame Carbonell passed out on the floor and we put her to bed. Since then she has been tight-lipped, and there is barely any communication between us.

Charlotte, who lives with her young daughter and her Spanish maid, had told Mutti even before this nasty incident that, with her husband away in France, she feels lonely. When she hears of the awful scene we had, and that I plan on leaving to take a job in Madrid, she warmly invites Mutti to join her in her apartment, charging her just a very nominal rent. This appears indeed a fine solution, for they

have become good friends. Of course, I could not leave Barcelona unless I knew Mutti was in good hands. This resolved, I now feel free to accept the job in Madrid.

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The monotony and the motion of the creaky old railroad car, rumbling through the night on the way to Madrid, has rocked my fellow travelers to sleep. My mind, between wakefulness and fitful sleep, wanders from episodes of the recent past to anticipating what tomorrow may bring. My reverie ends as the train pulls into Madrid's Atocha Station, bustling with activity. I splash water on my face and have a bite to eat at the station's buffet. Then I set out by subway, valise in hand, for Puerta del Sol Station, as I was told just a stone's throw away from the Berlitz School. It may be too early to see Senor Bermudez, but I decide to stop by and drop off my suitcase before I look for lodgings. The clock of the "Puerta del Sol" tower strikes ten, and the sun already beats down mercilessly. I walk on the shady side of Arenal Street to the fine building which houses the Berlitz School, right in the heart of the city.

The pretty young lady behind the reception desk greets me with a radiant smile. When I tell her my name she welcomes me in correct German. "We were expecting you today or tomorrow, Herr Mewes, we just didn't know which train you would choose. You must be exhausted from the long train ride."

"Well yes, sitting up all night was tiring, but I feel all right. You speak German very well. Did you spend some time in Germany?" I inquire.

"No, I have never been abroad. But I enjoy learning languages and have studied German here at the school as well as some French and English. I occasionally attend classes when someone will take my place at the reception desk. By the way, Herr Mewes, I am Blanca Carrillo."

"I am pleased to meet you. The school is fortunate to have such a fine linguist for a receptionist. If you keep it up you might some day be able to teach classes here."

"You are just flattering me. But what little I have learned is useful here at the school."

"I am sure it is. By the way, is the Director in?"

"Senor Bermudez should be here shortly. Would you like to relax in the teachers' lounge while you are waiting for him? Please help yourself to some coffee."

Declining her offer, I tell her that I will stroll about the neighborhood to look for accommodations. I freshen up, glad to be rid of my suitcase. There are the signs of several boarding houses in the adjoining streets.

Returning from my walk Senor Bermudez, a distinguished-looking man in his fifties, greets me politely and inquires about my well-being. He acknowledges in confidence that he knows I am the nephew of Stephen Sanders, alias for my Uncle Pista. Since he was teaching English he took on this anglicized nom de plume. Senor Bermudez leads me to his office and explains what he expects of me: courtesy, dependability and, above all, strict adherence to the Berlitz conversational method of instruction. In return, he affirms, I may look forward to fair treatment and fair compensation for my work and expect a steady volume of students. He confirms that there is indeed a growing demand for German, and he is confident that I will have more than enough students to keep me busy.

There are two other German teachers at the school: Frau Aeckers from Cologne and Herr Gerlach, an elderly gentlemen from Hannover. I am being hired to replace Fraeulein Jacobi who, like Pista, left for America. Senor Bermudez remarks, with a smile, that at age eighteen I am the youngest person he ever hired as a teacher, and only since I come recommended by his colleague from Barcelona. My young age makes it especially important that I conduct myself in a serious, responsible manner. He hands me a manual with teaching guidelines and the German language book; I am to familiarize myself with the contents and report to him later for further instructions. I have no choice but to tell him of my predicament: I have absolutely no money and must, therefore, ask him for a salary advance. He takes my request without flinching and instructs Senorita Carrillo to pay me 150 pesetas.

Senor Bermudez introduces me to the few instructors who are now in the teachers' lounge. There is Madame Heloise Cadet, a mature French lady with flaming red hair who rolls her own cigarettes of thick, dark tobacco; Mr. Ernest Brockton, in his late forties, with

grey, receding hair, teaching English; Signor Carlo Galetti, a spirited Roman, perhaps ten years my senior, and finally old Herr Gerlach, dozing in the stuffed armchair in the corner. They all welcome me warmly and seem astonished to get such a young fellow for a colleague. For the evening classes, I am told, a few more teachers will be here.

My immediate concern is finding an affordable boarding house nearby. Both the Englishman and the Italian give me the names of theirs, not far from here. Senorita Carrillo recommends still another place where former teachers had been lodging. She loans me a city map and I am on my way. My first stop is near the Rastro open air market; I dismiss it as being too far from work. Near the Gran Via, in a neighborhood of hotels and department stores, I visit two small boarding houses located side by side; one is Italian, the other Spanish. They charge about the same rent. I choose the latter, Pension Valdez, since the room they offer me has a window to the street. I discover that Carlo, the Italian teacher, is staying at the same pension which makes us neighbors. I carry my suitcase from school to the pension on Calle San Martin in sweltering heat; I never had imagined that Madrid would be this hot.

Senor Bermudez discusses with me the lesson plan for a private student whom I am taking over from Fraeulein Jacobi.

"This will be the student's sixth lessons, and the lady already knows the common objects in the room, the colors, the dimensions. You will be teaching her "Wer ist das?" (Who is this?), "Das ist die Schuelerin" (That is the student), "Wer ist in dem Zimmer?" (Who is in the room?)

"Herr Mewes, teach your students to think in German! This calls for constant repetition and helping students assimilate new material from what they already know, going from the simple to the more complex. You may feel tempted to explain things to your students in their native Spanish, but that would run counter to the Berlitz method and is strictly forbidden," Senor Bermudez warns me.

I hope that I look professional enough in my black confirmation suit. It is about to become my Berlitz uniform since it supposedly makes me look older, more mature than my age. My first student, Senora Gomez, impresses me as a well-to-do matron. I muster up all my self-assurance and greet her with a smile: "Guten Tag! Ich bin

Herr Mewes, der neue Lehrer. Bitte setzen Sie sich! Wie geht es Ihnen?" Senora Marti understands me well enough and answers most of my questions correctly. When I detect a blank look on her face I try something simpler, something familiar. Some gestures, more questions, pointing at pictures in the book, repetition, repetition! Before I know it, the lesson is over, and I dismiss the senora with the words "Das ist Alles fuer heute. Auf Wiedersehen! Bis auf naechsten Freitag!" (That's all for today. Good bye. Until next Friday!)

Senor Bermudez has been eavesdropping from the corridor and compliments me on the way I taught the class. This gives me confidence for the group classes that follow, the first one with six beginners, the next one more advanced. The lesson is about travel, and I encourage the students to share with us their experiences or plan an imaginary trip. Everyone has fun, including me.

I am relieved and pleased that this first school day has been a success. Even after I go to bed and try falling asleep, my mind just won't give me rest. I am still carrying on those endless dialogues, jabbering in German about places, trains, hotels and sightseeing!

Life at my pension is congenial; it is definitely a "pension de familia" (a family boarding house). Quique, our landlady's little boy, three years old, and his five-year-old sister, Pili, steal everyone's heart with their laughter and playful ways. They break through the reserve of the otherwise distant elderly couple from Room 9. The children treat them simply as Tio (Uncle) Bob and Tia (Aunt) Susana. Likewise Senor Calderon, ordinarily living up to the dignity demanded of the head cashier of the Banco de Bilboa branch, becomes just another playmate to those little heartbreakers. Nor does my black confirmation suit, meant to inspire formality and respect, keep the little rascals from jumping all over me. To them we are all just uncles and aunts who are here for their entertainment. This brings us all closer together, even when the children are not around.

The food situation in Madrid seems even worse than it was in Barcelona; here there is very little meat and no fish to be had. Senora Valdez does her best to supplement the meager rations with food she occasionally buys on the black market. Beans and lentils are plentiful and make up the mainstay of our diet. The bread is barely edible; people often throw away the pasty inside, munching only on the crisp outer crust. We groan about the poor quality and monotony of our

diet, but it's the same story all over town. It would be futile moving to another boarding house in the hope of doing better elsewhere.

Since there is never enough to eat, food is on everyone's mind. Among the items occasionally available and sold without coupons are "boniatos" (sweet potatoes); I sometimes bake one of them on top of the stove in the teachers' lounge and offer a colleague a spoonful or two. Goodwill develops and is tested by small, friendly gestures of sharing one's bonanza with others. The other day Carlo tipped me off about a grocery store that sells a kind of sour milk called "kefir." At first I find it unappealing, but sweetened with sugar or honey, also in short supply, I succeed in cultivating a taste for the stuff. Raisins, nuts and almonds, though not cheap, help appease the grumbling of an empty stomach.

Mutti and I write to each other every few days. She seems to feel at home with Charlotte and her little daughter, much to my relief. When she loses first one and then another of her millinery students, Senor Pujol from the fashion school declares the experiment of the millinery course as failed and insists that she terminate her class. Working from home is out of the question. Fortunately Modas Madelaine is busy enough to use Mutti's sewing skills to help with alterations as need arises. This brings in a few extra pesetas in addition to the little money I am sending her. Charlotte charges her very little for her room and board.

It is good to hear from Aunt Yvonne in Hamburg; she congratulates me on being a German teacher now. If she only knew how elementary and parrot-like my lessons are. She keeps me abreast of the home news, Oma and Opa, my cousins now evacuated, the war on the home front, the pressures brought upon her by the school authorities and her revulsion against the Nazis, concluding: "What they have done to Germany and the world!"

Franco and the Falange Party fully support Germany's offensive against Soviet Russia and are eager to launch a holy campaign against the godless Reds. Within weeks the first Spanish volunteer battalions, named the "Division Azul," (Blue Division) leave for Germany to fight shoulder to shoulder with their German comrades to defeat the atheist enemies of Christian civilization. The Spanish press and the church glorify their sacred mission.

Today the Falange Party and the Army are parading along Calle Alcala in a show of solidarity with the volunteers of the "Division Azul." The Falangists look impeccable in their black shirts and red berets, singing their hymns. They are followed by a contingent of North African Berbers in flowing white ethnic tunics. Riding camels, they are members of Generalisimo Franco's honor guard from Spanish Morocco; it was with their help that he launched his attack on the mainland that marked the start of the Civil War. Next follows an army band playing military marches, then a sea of flags and finally an army battalion in gala uniforms. I am told that the large bone saws, slung over the backs of the medical corpsmen, are symbolic these days rather than for actual use.

At school I often have some free time between one class and the next; I spend it reading, writing letters or chatting with colleagues in the teachers' lounge. It is shabbily furnished, heavy with the odor of stale cigarette smoke, and it lacks daylight. When the waiting period is too long, I retreat to my room at the pension or walk about town, watching people and the animated street scenes.

Once in a while I have an aperitif with Carlo, my Italian colleague who boards at the same pension. He is cheerful, outgoing, and obviously far more practiced in the ways of the world than I am. I can't keep company with him too often for, in contrast to me, thrifty both by necessity as well as by nature, he is a spender. When he has money in his pocket Carlo likes to party with his friends. They start with aperitifs and "tapas" (appetizers) at a sidewalk cafe, followed by dinner at a fine restaurant, and end the evening with ladies of the night; these escapades leave Carlo penniless. The memories must last him till he can afford another spree.

The summer heat gives way to fall, and as winter nears, cold gales bear down on the city from the Guadarrama mountains. By now I consider myself somewhat of a "madrileno" (resident of Madrid), having visited many of the capital's places of interest. Repeat visits to the Prado Museum have given me the chance to familiarize myself with the works of the great Spanish painters: Goya, Velasquez, El Greco and Ribera, along with those of the Flemish, Italian and other European masters. I keep returning to the wonderful Retiro Park and the nearby Botanical Garden. I have also toured the grounds and salons of the Royal Palace and visited the Cervantes monument on

Plaza de Espana. Near our school a favorite of mine is the Plaza Mayor, the largest and most perfect square in all of Spain. Surrounded by graceful arcades, it has witnessed, over the centuries, the burning of heretics, royal weddings, bullfights and coronations.

The news from Barcelona is disturbing. After a long silence, Herr Schlueter once again threatens that his patience with Mutti is running out and she must return to Germany, if not on her own accord then by force. It is just a few days before Christmas and class attendance is low this time of year. Senor Bermudez understands that I long to spend the holidays with my mother. So carrying a few gifts I find myself again on the broken-down old night train to Barcelona for a brief holiday visit. Mutti is so happy to have me with her, and Charlotte graciously puts me up on the sofa for these few nights. "You'll be our Santa Claus," she jokes. Though Mutti is contributing a little to the household expenses she is much in Charlotte's debt for her friendship and hospitality.

Tonight will be Christmas Eve. Mutti and I ride out on the suburban train to Blanes, and we take little Susi with us for a walk in the woods. We break off a few branches from a fir tree; with red ribbons and white candles Mutti fashions them into a holiday wreath, bringing back memories and brightening our table for the holiday supper. Susi is thrilled with her Christmas gifts: a dress from her mother, a bonnet from Mutti, and the "madrilena" doll I brought her from Madrid. Sharing with each other the joys of the season, the child's laughter, some sweets and a bit of wine we forget our worries and our homesickness.

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The order that Mutti must return to Germany within a month is much on our minds. Will the Consulate carry out its threat to repatriate her against her will? She is tormented by the thought of leaving me behind. How can we manage to stay in Spain together and support ourselves?

"Puedi, promise me that if they send me back to Germany you will follow me."

"Well, it is true that there is no future for me there. Nonetheless, if it is up to me I won't let you down! I guess if you married a Spaniard they couldn't ship you back, could they?" I say jokingly.

When Mutti repeats to Senora Pla during our holiday visit what I had said in jest, she believes it is an idea worth exploring. And, what is more, she thinks she may have a potential candidate: her seventy-three-year-old Uncle Jose. At first we do not believe she could be serious, but apparently she is, full of her usual optimism. She describes Tio Jose as an old widower, quite deaf. He lives a few blocks away with his niece Maria on a small pension from the customs administration. Ever since he was forced to retire he felt entitled to a higher pension than he is receiving. Therefore, he is spending his time airing old grievances and writing petitions. Senora Pla will speak to him about our idea. Next day she sends us word that Tio Jose is willing to discuss the matter; we are all to meet at his niece's home this evening at seven o'clock. Is this just a joke or is the idea worth pursuing?

Senora Pla's sister Maria, a vivacious platinum blond like she is, ushers Tio Jose into the room. Gaunt and of slight stature, he nods at us unsmilingly as we sit down around the living room table. Senora Maria pours wine and we all clink glasses to create a favorable atmosphere. Tio Jose looks frail but speaks with an unexpectedly loud and firm voice. To our amazement, he carries a large cows horn slung over his shoulder; he hears better when, holding its tip to his left ear, one talks right into the horn. I speak to him of Mutti's need to obtain, for political reasons, permanent residence in Spain, and that marrying a Spaniard might accomplish this. Senora Pla chimes in stressing what dear friends and nice people we are, and how good a deed it would be for him to shield Mutti from expulsion. His face betrays no emotion; he coolly inquires how much would it be worth to us if he married her. We are taken aback by his bluntness as if nothing but money mattered. Perhaps Tio Jose looks upon our proposal as his chance to earn some of the money which the government keeps denying him. Senora Pla belabors with him in Catalan that she hoped he might be moderate in his demand and look upon it mainly as a favor to good friends of hers. I ask him to name his price.

"Two thousand five hundred pesetas and a new suit," he demands.

I earn only 500 pesetas a month and have no savings: this is, therefore, an unaffordable sum of money. Might he instead accept 1.000 pesetas, in partial payments? He shakes his head with determination and rises, giving us a disdainful look. Fortunately we had not put too much hope in Tio Jose saving the day. On our way home I kid Mutti about her "fiance" and what a handsome couple they might have made, cow horn and all!

Tomorrow I shall take the morning train back to Madrid. A New Year's Eve party is held at a neighbor's flat: everybody is welcome. There are balloons, streamers and paper hats: all are dancing the Lambeth Walk and Charleston in the crowded place. Marlene Dietrich hits are blaring from the gramophone. Our hosts are from Poland; they alternate speaking in German, Yiddish and Spanish. There are also Hungarians, Czechs, Austrians and Frenchmen: a truly international crowd. All are here to forget their troubles and to receive 1942 with a bang. I am drinking far more than I have ever drunk before and am feeling no pain. Happy New Year! I wake up, with Mutti shaking her head disapprovingly, saying gravely: "Your train has left!"

*****

The chill of the Madrid winter keeps me bundled up and indoors most of the time. I learn to appreciate the dingy teachers' lounge because of its enormous stove, powerful enough to centrally heat all the classrooms. At the pension it is warm only in the dining room, where at meal times Senora Valdez has a lit "brasero" charcoal brazier under the table.

Doing my best to keep moderately warm reminds me of the German and Spanish soldiers fighting in the frozen steppes of Russia. Winter has slowed their offensive against the Soviets, and reading between the lines of the war bulletins, casualties among the German Army and Spain's Division Azul appear heavy. Franco's sympathies in the war were always with his supporters Germany and Italy. In fact, last year he had come close to entering the war on their side. However, the "Blitzkrieg" against the Soviet Union is but a distant memory. America, after the Pearl Harbor attack, is preparing to fight

the Axis powers; therefore Franco, always circumspect, reaffirms Spain's policy of non-belligerency.

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Senorita Carrillo interrupts me in the middle of teaching my class; there must be trouble.

On the telephone Mutti's voice sounds shrill from agitation:

"Schlueter has me booked on this afternoon's express train for Berlin. A courier from the Consulate will be on the train and keep an eye on me. The Spanish police refused to renew my residence permit. Without my passport and having nowhere else to go, what was I to do but give in to Schlueter. He didn't waste any time. You know how he has been hounding me all this time. He says I'll get to Hamburg Monday or Tuesday. Honestly, with Imre gone, penniless, you so far away, and my residence permit revoked, I am at my wits end! I can no longer fight the inevitable! But what about you? Bad enough that these last few months you were so far from me! I can't stand the thought of us being permanently separated, you living in Spain and I in Germany! You are all I have in this world!"

"How do I know that I may even be able to return. And what future is there for me! That's why I left Germany in the first place!"

"Yes, but now with your father gone, you unable to get to America, me back in Hamburg, you must not stay in Spain alone. Hamburg is your home where you belong, with your family, with those who love you. Puedi, promise me that you will return!"

"Well, I shall see. So long. I will think of you all the time. Perhaps we'll all meet happily again at home on the Grindelberg!"

I am heartsick and confused. The threat of Mutti's forced repatriation had long been hanging over our heads, but now that it is happening it comes as a hard blow. My main worry is: will the charge of her having violated the Nuremberg Race Laws haunt her on her return?

And what awaits me should I go back to Hamburg as Mutti begs me to do? Unlike her, I am not accused of violating any laws. But my big problem is that the testimony we gave Schlueter of having been ignorant of Father's Jewish origin is, of course, contradicted by the records on file in Hamburg which identify me as a first-degree Jewish

Mischling. When I think how badly I had wanted to leave Germany! But what about my loyalty to Mutti and my family? It is truly a great dilemma for me!

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The winning streak of the Axis powers seems over, at least for now, and Germany appears no longer invincible. It may be folly to return, but how can I ignore my mother's plea when she is so firmly counting on me.

Senor Bermudez is disgruntled that I am resigning from my teaching job on short notice. Like most of my acquaintances he is convinced that returning to Germany now, with the war going badly and the air war intensifying, is a poor idea. But no one else is in my shoes and knows what I must do.

Hermine and Dr. Wilhelm Mewes, grandparents, 1922

Rear, left to right: Aunts Lotti and Marianne, grandmother, Uncle Edmund, mother, Aunts Erna and Yvonne - front: Cousins Wilfried and Ursula, grandfather, Harry 1934

Aunt Yvonne Mewes (Ymp), 1938

Uncle Edmund and Aunt Lotti Wentzensen, 1946

Harry at ages 3 to 25 and with Anne and Eric Santo (father and step-mother) 1946

Aunt Marianne and husband Dr. Maurus Liertz

Cousin Ursula (Uschi) Wentzensen

Cousin Wilfried Wentzensen

Great Aunt Ella Mewes and 2nd cousin Barbara Winkler

Right to left: Uncle Pista, Senora Pla, Mutti, Sra Pla's son Jose-Maria
Barcelona 1940

Otto Damberg (Petsch)

Father Imre (Eric) Szanto, 1935 fathers mother, sister Maria, cousin Agnes (Agi) 1932

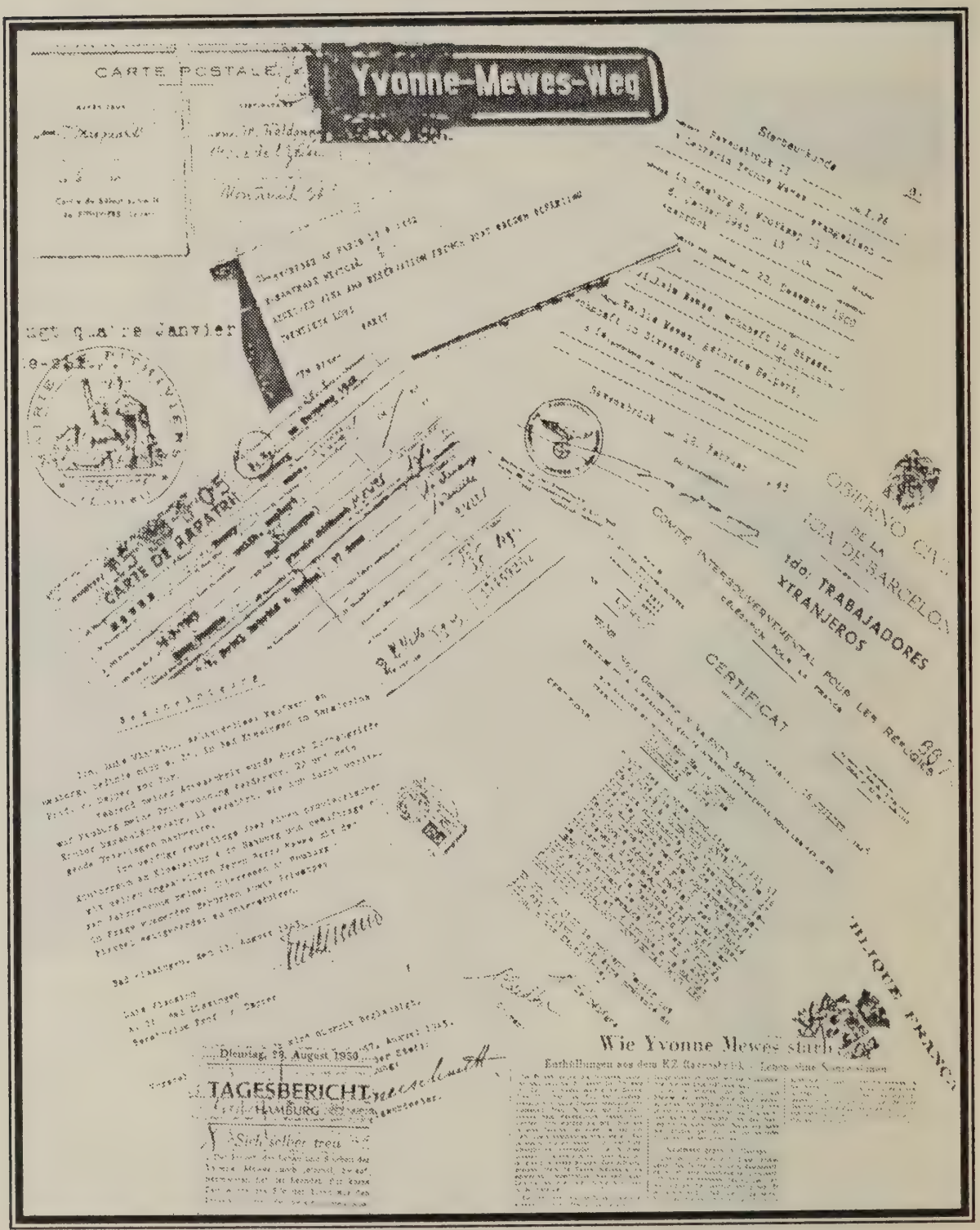
Mother (Mutti), 1935

Trudi and Werner (Sonni) Marquardt, (mother and step-father) 1944

Mother at 85th Birthday

Mother and Son, Christmas 2000

Harry with wife Anne, 2001


Yvonne-Mewes-Weg
CARTE POSTALE
CARTE DE RAPATRI
CONTRÔLE INTERGOUVERNEMENTAL POUR LES RÉFUGIÉS
CERTIFICAT
TRABAJADORES
XTRANJEROS
Wie Yvonne Mewes starb
TAGESBERICHT
HAMBURG

Mementos

RETURN TO HAMBURG

Three weeks ago, in mid-February, 1942, Mutti's anguished phone call made me trade the relative safety and tranquility of Madrid for the perils of Hamburg! Now, after endless hours on scruffy trains, railway stations and border crossings teaming with humanity, my worries about Mutti's fate as well as my own give way to the joy of seeing again the beloved landscape of the Lueneburg Heath. There are the familiar railway stations, the old towns and villages on the way to Hamburg: Celle, Uelzen, Bevensen and now Lueneburg, with its gables, mighty church steeples and the ancient crane on the banks of the Ilmenau River. As Hamburg draws close I notice, with alarm, bomb damage all around.

At long last I enter the front yard of my native house, undistinguished yet so precious to me. There Opa's shingle, Dr. Wilhelm Mewes, med. dent. greets me, making me feel like the prodigal son of biblical lore.

Ringing the door bell to my surprise a pretty blond girl opens the door.

"Hello! You are Harry, no? I recognize you from photographs. I am Simone."

I love her French accent and her radiant smile. Now I remember that a few months ago Aunt Yvonne had mentioned in one of her letters that a French girl, engaged to a German soldier, had started working here. As a dentist, Opa is entitled to get help with his practice and the household. So the labor department had referred Simone to my grandparents to work as an "au pair," to learn German and get acquainted with the German way of life.

"Happy to meet you. Is my mother home?" I inquire impatiently.

"Yes, yes," she beams at me. "She will be very happy to see you."

I am so relieved by her affirmative answer. All these weeks I had anguished what might have happened to her after she returned. What happiness and excitement when I burst into the room, surprising Mutti, Oma and Opa at supper, home again after a year and a half! There is so much to talk about, to catch up on! And Mutti tells me she is already employed!

She definitely wanted to avoid working at a defense plant as Herr Schlueter had ordered her to do. Once again her long time friend, Friedel Goehring, was able to help. As luck would have it, through an acquaintance at city hall he learned of an immediate opening at the alien registration office, and she applied. It called for a clerk, preferably with basic foreign language skills, to register and fingerprint "Gastarbeiter," (alien guest workers) and issue them identity cards. Mutti's notions of French and Spanish appeared desirable, and she was hired on the spot, to start work right away to help reduce a heavy backlog. She loves the work and her fellow workers. How ironic that here she is doing rather responsible work for the city government, whereas not long ago she seemed in danger of being charged with a very serious offence. What a reversal of fortune!

We are having a quiet night without alert, a welcome chance to recuperate from my tiring trip. Now, bundled up in my winter coat, I want to see for myself how our neighborhood and the city center have fared under the onslaught of the bombs during my long absence. To my relief I find my school and the adjoining St. Andreas Church unharmed. I crisscross the quiet, tree-lined streets of Harvestehude with its neat apartment houses and fine homes. Damage does not seem as widespread as I had feared; nonetheless I cringe when I see a large apartment building flattened here, a row of one-family homes burnt out there. The Alster, frozen solid two winters ago, now carries no ice though the weather feels very cold to me compared to Spain.

I cross the Lombards Bridge; spanning the Alster Lake at its narrowest point and separating it into the wide outer and the small inner lake. The Inner Alster is set off by the beautiful skyline of the central city with its imposing city hall, the steeples of its many churches, most prominently St. Nicolai. At a distance stands St. Michael's, Hamburg's landmark. To my relief they all seem intact, watching over city and port. The formerly elegant Jungfernstieg Boulevard is now full of deep bomb craters and damaged business buildings; the show windows of many large department stores are boarded up. But people go about their business as usual. The suburban train takes me to the overseas landing pier in the harbor.

Despairingly, I survey the rubble along the canals where proud Hanseatic office buildings and warehouses had once stood!

This morning I see for the first time those unfortunate ones who are forced to wear the Star of David. The news about this outrage affecting all Jews in Germany and in the occupied countries had been prominently written up in the Spanish press. Reading about it is one thing, but seeing people in this condition horrifies me. Opa is still treating a few remaining Jewish patients, the Friedmanns and Frau Wertheimer, and he does whatever he can to comfort and encourage them. Fortunately most of our family's Jewish friends as well as classmates of mine were able to emigrate before these shameful measures went into effect. Those who could not find safe havens abroad or had refused to believe that their native Germany might harm them, are now facing deportation. They have to assemble at the Moorweide Meadow near Dammtor Station for resettlement, God knows where, probably in Poland which always was home to a large Jewish population. Germany must be made "judenfrei" (free of Jews). The Nuremberg Laws have stripped them of all their civil rights. And once the Nazis have gotten rid of the Jews, half-Jews like me are probably the next to go!

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Our Sunday afternoon family circle has dwindled since the days of my childhood. My aunts have all moved away, my uncles are in the army. I miss the warmth and laughter of earlier times, especially when Cousins Wilfried and Uschi were still in town. Last fall they were evacuated along with their schoolmates, from the exposed North to the more sheltered South; they are now in Bavaria. Aunt Lotti followed them to Passau, an old city on the Danube, said to possess great charm. They had to make do with modest quarters but seem to have adjusted extremely well to the great cultural differences between Germany's North and South. Uncle Edmund serves as a military judge in occupied Denmark.

Opa, now bent and gray, is still full of life and wit; Oma, no longer so limber on her feet, continues to be the undisputed matriarch of our family. It is wonderful to see Aunt Yvonne again. She has just

been transferred to another school in punishment for her alleged intransigence. There is talk that her own may also soon be evacuated.

My old friend and travel companion, Petsch, is still very much part of what remains of the family circle, gathering here today. I had forgotten how heavily he stutters; perhaps it has gotten worse with the years. He always was a bit of a hypochondriac; in these tense times his litany of complaints about bad nerves, ringing in his ears and other ills sounds quite believable. Petsch and Aunt Yvonne, both art lovers, are interested in hearing about Madrid's famous Prado Museum and my tales of Spain. I enjoy sharing my experiences with them, proud to have seen a bit of the world.

Simone is treated like a member of the family, taking her meals with us in the dining room. Sometimes my grandparents speak French to her though she is here to learn German. Her native town is Saint Omer in Normandy where her father owns a bakery. German soldiers often bought bread or pastries at his shop. That is how she met Wolfgang, a tall, handsome infantryman. With his winning smile and a smattering of French he must have captured her heart. When after several months of hushed confidences and stolen kisses he received his marching orders for the Eastern front, Simone wept bitterly. Wolfgang vowed never to forget her and bought her an engagement ring. Smitten with him, to the dismay of her family she accepted it. She agreed to work in Germany until the end of the war to get to know her fiance's family. Working as an "au pair" seemed the best way, and so she came to live with us. I suspect that she knows Wolfgang only superficially. Since his regiment has left France and he is now serving at the Russian front, the two are writing to each other at long intervals. War makes for such chance encounters, causing both bliss and heartbreak.

Today Simone is gone. She spends, I learn to my disappointment, her weekends with her fiance's family in Hammerbrook. This causes me pain, for I cannot help thinking of her more and more as mine; her presence at our house is for me as if a bright ray of sun had suddenly broken through the cloudy sky of my existence. Simone and I felt close to each other from the instant of my return. She is so sweet and charming, and her French accent so endearing! Life can't be easy for her in this strange environment, away from family and friends, exposed to the rigors of war, trying to learn a difficult foreign tongue.

It reminds me of how I had sometimes felt abroad. When I see her searching for the right words or the correct German pronunciation I am, with my teaching background, always delighted to help her. In turn her presence challenges me to improve my sketchy French. In school it was drudgery, but with her by my side it is such fun.

The prohibitions imposed by the Nuremberg Laws were, no doubt, reinforced in me by a certain natural shyness toward the opposite sex. That is why until now I had never allowed myself any real closeness to women in Germany. But Simone is right next to me in flesh and blood, day and night. We are both young, lonely and harbor tender feelings toward each other. How can we help not being strongly drawn to each other?

*****

Mutti found her job unbelievably fast; now it is my turn to try my luck. With Hamburg being a world port, I hope that my knowledge of Spanish and freight forwarding may help me locate a suitable one. Therefore, I call on the commercial attache of the Spanish Consulate to provide me with a roster of Spanish business firms. I try my luck at two firms whose names I recognize from my working days with Otto Bensel A.G. and visit their offices. The first one, Carlos Mijares S.A., does not need help. At the office of Luis Vizcaino I have been asked to return the day after tomorrow when the owner is expected to be in. The firm is very small but located in a fine, modern building near the Central Market right behind the main freight terminal.

On Friday I report for the interview. Senor Vizcaino is a portly man in his fifties, pleasant but formal, a bit distant. He is surprised to have a Spanish-speaking applicant and tells me about his firm, engaged since 1930 in importing citrus fruit from Spain. In these days of food rationing, the importation of foodstuff into Germany commands priority. His company is very busy despite its small size, especially since their import clerk was drafted into the army a few weeks ago. Aside from the owner, Herr Gustav Riege, the older man who had received me yesterday, carries the firm's main workload on his shoulders. Since he is in failing health, and even Senor Vizcaino keeps visiting spas on account of his heart condition, a young man like me with language and forwarding skills appearing out of nowhere

must seem a godsend. To protect myself against any unpleasant surprises later on I tell Senor Vizcaino of my "Mischling" status. Rather than being disturbed by this disclosure, he considers it a plus since it should keep me from being inducted into military service. He therefore hires me immediately and I am to report for work next Monday.

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The return to Germany means for Mutti and me facing anew the unrelenting air war. Two nights ago we huddled again for hours in the civil defense shelter. Our anti-aircraft batteries fired at the intruders in the sky, but fortunately the enemy bombers passed us by, evidently to unload their deadly cargo elsewhere. Today the newspaper reports that their target was Luebeck, our nearby Hanseatic sister city. In past visits I had so much enjoyed its ancient squares and alleys; now much of it is reduced to rubble. Even the magnificent cathedral is reported to be heavily damaged.

While we were in Spain the ceiling of our air raid shelter had been reinforced with strong wooden poles, and a steel window and door were installed for protection. The civil defense department also supplied double-decker bunk beds. Along with an odd assortment of discarded armchairs, pillows and blankets, all this offers modest comfort during those fearsome hours of the night. Fortunately, the central heating which Opa had ordered years ago was finally delivered. We now take turns shoveling coal briquettes into the yawning mouth of the large black furnace and stoking the fire. In previous years the basement had been dank and clammy, now the heat radiates throughout it, making our stay in the shelter at least warmer than before. Having hot water and central heating are truly a blessing; too bad that the system ends at the second floor; Simone's room and mine on the third floor are as frigid as ever.

When the eery sound of the air raid sirens jolts us at night from our warm beds, we hurriedly throw on our warmest clothing, always ready by the bedside to brave the chill at these forbidding hours of the night. I wake up at the sirens' first wail, but Simone in her room across from mine is a sound sleeper. Therefore, if I don't see the light faintly glimmering under her door, I dash across the hall and rouse her

from her dreams. "Leve-toi, Simone, descendons!" (Wake up, let's run downstairs). Leading her by the hand down the winding staircase to the shelter, I feel her shivering from cold and fear. We huddle close to each other on the bunk bed, awaiting what the night might bring.

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It is good to see Mutti happy. Her former boy friend Werner, whom everybody calls Sonni, works downtown at a forwarding company. He learned from his boss, Friedel Goehring, that his old flame is back in town and that she is working just a few blocks from his office. He, therefore, surprised her when she left her office building on her lunch break. It has been three years since they last saw each other but tender feelings still remain. They are now spending a lot of time in each other's company. Mutti deserves some happiness after the anxieties and disappointments of the past years. Yesterday he came over and took Mutti and me to see a movie at the Ufa Palast Theater. How nice that this old romance is blossoming again.

At a small firm like Luis Vizcaino's one has to perform lowly tasks as well as important ones for there is just no one else to do them. I run errands, write foreign correspondence, clear shipments through customs and represent the company in the hustle and bustle of the Central Market. Herr Riege is, at the age of forty-two, a tragic figure: an amputee who has lost most of his left leg to diabetes. The disease keeps eating away at the bone like gangrene, causing him pain and terror, both written on his face. Even after several operations the doctors cannot be sure that they have arrested the spread of the cruel illness. Herr Riege has been office manager and general factotum for six years. He now feels relieved that I am taking over some of the duties which he is no longer able to perform. Except for his tragic amputations Herr Riege is a handsome man with a shock of blond hair. When not in pain he loves telling jokes and anecdotes in his beloved "platt-duetsch" (Low German), yet anguish and despair never loom far below the surface.

Senor Vizcaino is a good businessman with a quick mind, easy to get along with as long as one strictly follows his orders. In general I

consider him fair-minded but resent it when at times he makes unreasonable demands. Last week he had me lug a heavy crate of oranges to the flat of his cute German girl friend, Gerda. First I had to take the streetcar, then walk a long distance to her apartment building, and finally climb the steep staircase to the fourth floor where I arrived huffing and puffing.

I am spending much of my working day at the Central Market dealing with fruit and vegetable wholesalers. Since citrus fruit is in short supply, everybody is quite solicitous of us, even though the oranges we are discussing may still be ripening in the groves near Valencia. But it is important to maintain good relations throughout the year to reassure our customers that we will remember them when our shipments arrive. Good will and trust are at stake, especially important in these times of food rationing.

Today Mutti feels weak and miserable. Her skin has turned bright yellow and even the whites of her eyes have a yellowish tinge. Opa says it is jaundice and Dr. Schmidt confirms his diagnosis, prescribing a diet and bed rest. Lots of fruit and vegetables are recommended, both rare commodities these days. That is where my good relations to the wholesalers at the Central Market pay off with a head of cabbage, a cauliflower and even some fresh fruit. The day will come when I will be able to repay these little favors. Fortunately, after two weeks Mutti recuperates, regaining her normal skin color and strength.

During these days of rationing and shortages food is on everyone's mind. We all cultivate what is called in jest Vitamin B, standing for "Beziehungen" (connections). For instance, the butcher may at times favor a steady customer with 100 grams more meat than the lady of the house is entitled to, or with a few slices of hard-to-come-by ox tongue or liver. He may even give her a bone, much valued to make wholesome soup for the entire family. It flatters and pleases her if the grocer remembers her when candy, nuts or spirits make their fleeting appearance. Or the greengrocer may discretely sell her some turnips, citrus fruit, asparagus or mushrooms. Such rarities are kept under the counter, out of sight, only to be doled out to preferred customers. Grateful smiles and knowing glances acknowledge the significance of such favors, accompanied by whispers of deep appreciation.

It is all right to send Simone or me with our metal milk can across the street to the dairy for a liter of milk or to Daube's Bakery for half a dozen rolls on coupons. But more delicate shopping missions and special requests require Oma's seasoned judgment and diplomatic skills. Her standing among the merchants as "Frau Doktor" is a major intangible asset. Opa, the intellectual, removed from the machinations of the market place, finds himself occasionally the surprised recipient of gifts from grateful patients. Small merchants or people with ties to farming may bring him a chicken, half a dozen eggs, a jar of delicious home-made marmalade or a bottle of wine to express their gratitude for a well-fitting bridge, a weekend emergency repair or relief from a nasty toothache.

Coffee, cigarettes and spirits, rationed and always in short supply, are the "gold standard" of an underground economy. People with access to these treasures often barter them for necessities of life or for hard-to-obtain services, like having a window glazed that was shattered during the last air raid. Even ordinary folks often trade one commodity of their monthly rations for another one, more desirable to them: eggs or soap for coffee, butter or bacon for cigarettes. Nonsmokers are at an obvious advantage of having something valuable to trade. Ration coupons are issued at the start of each month. Unless coupons and food supplies are carefully managed, diets get leaner and leaner as the month goes by. Finally, some people may have to do without bread, meat, potatoes or other essentials.

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With each passing month the air raids are growing in intensity. At night the skies over Germany reverberate as wave upon wave of enemy bombers unloads its deadly cargo. The count of the dead, injured and homeless rises with the increasing destructive power of the bombs; whole city blocks go up in flames from the incendiary phosphor bombs. Massive raids not only hit us in Hamburg but also ravish Berlin, Cologne and countless other German cities. Those who used to hail the conquests made by Hitler's armies and who proclaimed Germany's victory imminent, have now, with total war unleashed on them at the home front, second thoughts.

During the air raids we seek refuge in our shelter, listening to the roar of approaching enemy bombers, the angry bark of our flak cannons, the screams of the falling bombs and feeling the violent quaking when they hit the ground. Opa is the bravest and most composed of the family. When bedlam reigns Simone and I cling to each other; I comfort her as best I can. These nights of terror bring us very close together. After the sirens sound the "all clear" and we make certain that our house and neighborhood are intact, we return to our retreat on the third floor. Once the heavy tension is lifted, we rejoice in being alive, finding rapture in each other's arms. "O, Simone, je t'aime, mon amour!"

I feel such great tenderness toward her, yet am not without a sense of guilt for betraying someone who, far away from home, is fighting for his country. Am I a scoundrel, coming between this soldier and his girl? Simone is not too discomforted by such thoughts. Is she callous when, without remorse, she professes caring deeply for me as well as him? Her love means everything to me. It is the most exciting and wonderful thing that has happened in my life.

My family is alarmed by our display of intimacy. We try not to flaunt it, but how can we conceal it during those long nights in the shelter? Oma is particularly worried, and in confidence warns me of the dangers such a relationship might entail, especially for someone in my situation. I reassure her that I am aware of them and will act responsibly.

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Sonni's employer had so far succeeded in having him deferred from being drafted into the army, but as casualties at the front soar and the need for reinforcements mounts, he too has received his draft notice, much to Mutti's chagrin. The two are very close and their bond goes back many years; to strengthen it as he must go to war he proposes their engagement now, with marriage to follow next year. Mutti happily accepts his proposal, and the date for a family engagement party is set for Sunday afternoon, two weeks from now, at our house. At this festive gathering our family meets for the first time Sonni's mother and his sister, Iris, both friendly but reserved. Who knows whether Mutti is exactly the daughter-in-law his mother

had wished for her son. Among the guests to the party are Petsch, his nephew Puttchen, and their boss Friedel through whom the couple had met years ago. Everybody is quite formally dressed, so rare these days. "Ersatz" coffee and punch which Friedel spiked for the occasion with some hard-to-come-by brandy is served. Mutti looks charming; she beams wearing her new engagement ring. The two make a handsome couple; one would never suspect her of being six years older than her fiance. In honor of the occasion they had their picture taken a few days ago at a downtown photo studio. The party breaks up early to avoid possible trouble by uninvited guests from the Royal Air Force.

I visit my colleague Gustav Riege at the Eppendorf Hospital. He just underwent a third operation on his left leg, now amputated to his upper thigh. Since much of the hospital is unusable, patients are crammed into an underground bunker. After a long search I spot my colleague lying on a cot in a sparsely-lit corridor. He sounds very discouraged and doubts that the doctors will be able to arrest the disease which devours his body. He is not expected to return to work for a long time, if ever. But he is always interested in the latest news from the market and our building.

"Everybody is asking for you and sending you best wishes! Senor Vizcaino and I are trying to hold the fort until you return. In last Saturday's raid the large picture window at the office was blown out. We got it boarded up again, but it is dark and drafty! The eighth floor attic is in bad shape; it was hit by incendiaries. Our building brigade helped bring the fire under control, but not before the section east of the elevator shaft burned out. The night before I had been on duty; luckily I missed all the excitement."

The war grinds on with no end in sight, and the elan of the first few war years is long gone. Hitler's promises of victory over Russia remain unfulfilled, victims not only of the Red Army's might but also of the brutal winter and the country's vast expanse. Now in November, 1942, the Soviets launch a counteroffensive at Stalingrad, and after ten weeks of fierce battle they reconquer what is left of the city, sending countless young Russian and German soldiers to their graves. Also gone is the myth of the German Army's invincibility in North Africa where Field Marshal Montgomery blunts the advances of the daring Afrika Korps, and General Rommel is defeated at El

Alamein. The glowing reports from the German Army Headquarters of victories on the battle field and in the skies over Britain have a hollow ring. The casualty lists in the newspapers of those who gave their lives "fuer Fuehrer und Vaterland" are endlessly growing. So many have someone near and dear either dead or wounded. Everybody fears, hopes or prays for a father, son or sweetheart at the front. War is hell!

THE "CATASTROPHE"

On this last Saturday in July, 1943, the weather is exceptionally lovely, warm and dry. My grandparents are spending a couple of days at a farm house near Mueden in the Lueneburg Heath. Aunt Yvonne is using ten days of her summer vacation bicycling and camping in East Friesland. As usual when she is away, I am looking after her apartment in Barmbeck. Simone generally leaves our house by Saturday noon to spend the weekend with Wolfgang's family in Hammerbrook. Since I have free reign over my aunt's apartment, Simone and I have plotted to take a walk in the Stadtpark, and then enjoy each other's company undisturbed in the seclusion of her nearby apartment. We rarely have a few hours all to ourselves, out of earshot and away from the intrusion of others. How fresh and delightful Simone looks in her flowered summer dress and with her long blond hair as we walk, hand in hand, along the park's peaceful pathways. At our hideout we embrace and hold each other closer than ever before, savoring our love with passionate abandon. The hours of rapture slip away until it is time to part.

Mutti and I are alone at home since my grandparents and Simone are gone. At 23 o'clock the sirens wail announcing an alert. We barely find the time to dress and scramble down to the shelter, our overnight bags in hand, when around us all hell breaks loose. Never before has the roar from wave upon wave of enemy aircraft been so deafening, nor the screaming of the bombs and their impact upon the ground all around us been so savage and so near. We gape in horror and seek shelter and comfort in each other's arms. The house heaves and groans as the earth quakes; the electric lights flicker and die out so that we have to resort to our flashlight. With a frightening crash the steel plate that covers the window bursts into the shelter, propelled by the force of a nearby explosion. Are we about to perish in this musty basement? With the steel plate gone, the pandemonium outside assails us with full force.

Over the hellish din outside we hear the pipes of our central heating system creaking and moaning, but we are too gripped by fear to open the steel door of our shelter to investigate the cause of all these strange sounds. Suddenly someone insistently raps at the house

door above, yelling at the top of his voice: "Get out before the house falls on top of you!" As we break open the heavy steel door, we dimly see through the heavy smoke a smoldering heap of rubble and embers where the staircase used to stand. Only then do we realize that our house and the adjoining ones are fully engulfed in flames. A team of steel-helmeted civil defense wardens is out there to get everybody out of their basements before it is too late. Two men grab us by our hands and pull us up to the street level, ordering us to run for cover in the communal shelter across the street.

That shelter is overflowing with frightened people, some burned, some injured. Shaken, sobbing, some carry small children in their arms, others console aged parents. They have all escaped from their doomed homes. Although the shelter is filled beyond capacity more refugees keep pouring in, breathless, terror written on their faces. Since the raid is still continuing, the wardens cannot turn newcomers away.

Then there is an anguished scream: "We are also on fire!"

Civil defense workers investigate and confirm that the upper floors of the apartment building are indeed aflame. It does not seem to be in danger of imminent collapse, yet people start leaving, a few at a time, leaderless. Where to turn? They are heading in all directions, some towards Hoheluftchaussee, others Grindelallee or the large public shelter at Helene Lange School. Someone mentioned a shelter near the Innocentia Park, so Mutti and I opt for making a run for that one.

Emerging from the shelter we catch a fleeting glimpse of where our home, now burnt to the ground, used to stand. The sounds of the air battle are still heard at a distance as we step into the intense heat and the blizzard of falling ash and cinders from the raging fires, threatening to take our breath away. Impulsively, for better or for worse, I grab my gas mask and put it over my head as protection from the cinders. Mutti follows my example. The masks are becoming burning hot. We feel near asphyxiation but summon all of our strength and will power to go on. The sky had been clear before the attack but, as we stumble along toward the park, a tremendous cloudburst suddenly drenches us. It mercifully cools off the suffocating air and somewhat abates the smoke and ash all around us.

Most of the aircraft seem to have left, but our flak anti-aircraft cannons are still firing at the stragglers from their emplacements in the park. We crouch down in the wet, muddy trenches dug into the earth, seeking shelter from flak shrapnel. After the firing subsides we join a throng of people surging in the direction of the nearby Catholic church in the Oberstrasse, so well remembered from when, as a small boy, I had asked Opa when God would move in.

The church, intact, now serves as a refugee reception center. People are milling around dazed, recounting their tales of horror to friends and strangers alike. Some rest on pews, too stunned, miserable or exhausted to move, sobbing, staring vacantly into space. In the far corner of the church, on benches or stretched out on blankets on the floor, the injured and burn victims receive first aid treatment. We line up with others in front of the main altar to register our names and former addresses on a roster of survivors. Many of the stained glass windows have miraculously remained intact; from them the Virgin and Child, and the saints appear to be looking down on us, gathered here in bedlam and misery. Dominus vobiscum - the Lord be with you!

What to do now that our house is gone and much of the neighborhood lies in shambles? Where to go? We must try to reach Oma and Opa in Mueden to bring them the sad news that once again they lost everything, much as they did twenty-five years ago in Strassburg after the Great War.

We wait in the church for daybreak. A heavy blanket of smoke from the smoldering fires hides the sky and dims the daylight. We plod along with our overnight bags toward the railway station, dodging mounds of debris and gaping bomb craters. A young woman, a stranger, calls out to us from her house to offer us food, drink and sympathy for our loss. People forget their reserve and are so neighborly under circumstances such as these. By her act of charity the woman may have expressed her gratitude for having been spared our fate, at least for another night.

Since Dammtor Station is cordoned off, we follow the stream of scruffy refugees across Lombards Bridge toward the Central Station. Despite the wide-spread devastation, evacuation trains leave sporadically. The platforms are overloaded, and when a train pulls in it is immediately assaulted by the crowd. No one bothers with tickets.

After hours of pushing and shoving we finally succeed in boarding a train heading south. Standing in the crowded compartment, the trip to Lueneburg seems endless. The graceful old town looks so peaceful and orderly after the bedlam we left behind. To our relief the old narrow-gauge train to Mueden is operating. As it wends its way through the lonely landscape of the Heath, passing a few quaint hamlets, we dread having to bring my grandparents the sad news.

As we reach our destination in the early afternoon there is a new alert. From high above we hear the deep roar of bomber formations headed for Hamburg. It must be the "Amis" (Americans), ready to strike in broad daylight; the British R.A.F. does its handiwork at night. We march roughly a kilometer along the sandy country road leading to the Schultz's farm house. The ground is littered with strips of aluminum foil which the enemy aircraft drop to defeat the aim of our flak anti-aircraft cannons.

People, among them Oma and Opa, are standing in the yard of the large farm house, searching the sky. Seeing us arrive in our bedraggled condition, my grandparents instantly know the reason why we are there. Like everybody else they were up during the night watching the northeastern sky lit up bright red from the fires raging in Hamburg, fearing for us and the family home. We hug sorrowfully, recounting our escape. Oma keeps sobbing but Opa preserves his usual stoic composure.

The afternoon attack seems over, and we wonder where to go now that our home has ceased to exist. Since Hamburg had long been a prime target in the air war, my grandparents had talked about perhaps returning to Strassburg in case their house were destroyed. On the other hand, Bavaria is designated as the primary evacuation area for our city, and Aunt Lotti lives in Passau with her two children already over a year. She has an apartment and loves it there. The best plan is, no doubt, for Mutti and me to accompany my elderly grandparents on a refugee train to Passau, where the family already has a foothold. We thus agree to leave tomorrow morning on an early train for Celle, and then try to get on a southbound train.

The Schultz family, good-hearted farm folks, feel sorry about our loss, especially for the old couple. To fortify us for the trip they serve us at daybreak their best ham and eggs "Bauern-Fruehstueck" (farmers' breakfast), and drive us with their horse-drawn farm wagon

to the train stop. Opa, lean and nimble despite his years, gets on and off the wagon and the railroad cars with ease, but for Oma, heavy set, negotiating the high steps is very hard.

From Celle to Hannover we travel in an overcrowded evacuation train; soon the German penchant for organization and discipline asserts itself: everyone gets his pass in a carriage to the desired destination, and my grandparents are assigned seats for the elderly. It is a long, tedious ride; occasionally our train gets shunted off to a secondary track, yielding to a scheduled train. At several stations ordinary folks or town delegations greet us with flowers, food and drink to show their solidarity and sympathy with those who lost everything.

PASSAU

After a seemingly endless journey we arrive past midnight, dead tired, at Aunt Lotti's in Passau. For the old folks the long trip was sheer hell; especially Oma is exhausted. Though unannounced, our arrival is not unexpected as over the last few days hundreds of refugees from Hamburg have arrived in the city. Since Uncle Edmund serves in the army in Denmark, my aunt gladly puts up Oma and Opa in her bedroom until other arrangements can be made. Mutti and I displace my Cousins Wilfried and Uschi from their beds; they don't mind; on the contrary, they are happy to have us with them.

Radio reports speak of another massive attack on Hamburg; firestorms have killed thousands in densely-populated residential neighborhoods. Did Petsch, Simone and others dear to us escape the death and destruction? Aunt Yvonne's neighborhood, Barmbeck, is mentioned among those badly ravaged. Thank God she is out of town. At worst, her flat may have been leveled, but she will be safe.

Wilfried is proud to be our guide in Passau. Despite our sorrow, we are all at first sight taken with the beauty and charm of this ancient city, dating back to Roman times. Called the "Three River City," Passau lies where the majestic Danube, the fast-flowing Inn and the placid Ilz rivers become one. On the rocky slopes above the Danube lies the medieval Oberhaus Fortress. Aunt Lotti's flat occupies the third floor of a building located two blocks from the stately city hall. Her building must be at least 300 years old, and its massive, musty walls are 1-1/2 meters thick. Passau prides itself on its many fine churches, the most imposing one is the Cathedral. Its organ is reputed to be the world's largest. As a lover of baroque organ music and a great admirer of this instrument's most creative genius, Johann Sebastian Bach, its powerful sound stirs me deeply. The city has a wealth of lovely buildings, towers, squares and fountains, never far from at least one of the three rivers.

Aunt Lotti is surprisingly well liked by the local people considering that she has lived here just a bit over a year. Perhaps she learned to speak the Bavarian dialect so quickly since it resembles a bit the one spoken in her native Strassburg. People like her "joie de vivre," her sense of humor and her hearty laugh. They also share her

fondness for good food and drink. She is a likable eccentric who enjoys finishing a good dinner with a cigar. Roaming the countryside on her trusty bicycle she, reverently addressed as "Frau Oberlandsgerichtsrat" (Mrs. Superior Court Justice), is warmly received wherever she goes. These forays to the farm belt help her supplement today's sparse food rations. Her good relations to the townspeople enable her to find a comfortable room for Oma and Opa and another one for Mutti; my mother's is located above Reiter Brothers' grocery store on the Inn-City Market Square, from where a fragrance of spices emanates. The geraniums and the cheerful window curtains give it a homey look.

The social service office at city hall is a busy place, for the refugees need money, identity papers, food stamps, vouchers for shoes and clothing, everything to begin their lives anew. Of course, people employed in Hamburg, like myself, must return to work as soon as their families are settled and the massive attacks have let up. Mutti falls in love with Passau. Since she wants to look after her old parents she resigns from her work place in Hamburg.

My boss, Senor Luis Vizcaino, is convalescing at Professor Dapper's Sanatorium in Bad Kissingen; a clerk at the Passau post office succeeds in connecting me by telephone with him. He is relieved to hear from me and to learn that I have survived the "catastrophe" in Hamburg. For the time being he intends to stay in Bad Kissingen, but wants me to carry on the affairs of the company in his absence. When he found out that both his apartment and the office building were destroyed, he reached an understanding with a fellow Spaniard to rent him space in his office at Klostertor 4, near our former address. He promises to send me a power of attorney, money and instructions that will enable me to carry on the firm's business in his absence. The orange harvest season is fast approaching, therefore I must return to Hamburg without delay. Perhaps Opa's sisters, my Great Aunts Emma and Ella, might be agreeable to putting me up for a while in their modest apartment in Altona. In wartime families pull together and help each other out.

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Children adjust so quickly to a new environment; my Cousins Wilfried and Uschi already speak the Bavarian dialect almost like natives. When evacuated by their Hamburg schools to Passau, they were very lucky to find loving care at the home of the Hoepfner family. These good people raised them with great love and understanding alongside their own two children of similar age, and sent them to the same school. Even after Aunt Lotti left Hamburg and found an apartment in Passau, Wilfried and Uschi stayed in close contact with their former foster parents. The Hopfners saw to it that they would both receive, true to the Bavarian tradition, thorough religious instruction at home and in the Catholic church. Though of Lutheran background, Aunt Lotti and Uncle Edmund had failed, as is not uncommon in Northern Germany, to have their children baptized. The Hoepfners did their best to raise them as good Catholics, and after a few months Wilfried and Uschi chose, with their parents' consent, to be baptized. Uschi saw the conversion as something natural since all her new schoolmates and friends regularly attended mass. Wilfried, on the other hand, immediately felt a deep longing to believe in God and the church. Now fourteen years old and very serious for his age, he follows the commandments and sacraments of his new faith with fervor. His piety, without precedent in our family, takes me by surprise.

We arrived in Passau ten days ago, and some semblance of normalcy has returned to our lives. Oma, recovered from the rigors of the long trip, is happy to be near two of her daughters and grandchildren. Opa, the eternal seeker, reads a lot and takes long walks along the three rivers and through the surrounding countryside. Since he discovered the public library, he resumes his habit of sitting up late into the night, sipping tea and finding fulfillment in reading.

After repeated tries Aunt Yvonne finally reaches her sister Lotti by telephone. The news is bad: returning from her bicycle trip to North Friesland, her fears were confirmed, and she found her flat along with most of her neighborhood in ashes. She is taking the loss very hard; her personal possessions, especially her books, were so important to her. Aunt Lotti reassures her that, having suffered a similar fate in Hamburg, her parents and sisters are finding beautiful Passau good for the soul.

"When are you coming to join us down here?" Lotti excitedly shouts into the receiver.

"Maybe you are right and I should give Passau a try," Yvonne responds. "The whole family seems to love it there."

She sounds tempted, and the local schools, overcrowded with children from the North, might just need an experienced language teacher like her. Lotti encourages her to come and see for herself.

PICKING UP THE PIECES

Hamburg is a grim place, and the city mourns the victims of the monstrous air raids which people call the "catastrophe." The number of civilians killed exceeds 42,000. Their bodies, many burnt beyond recognition in the firestorms, far too numerous for individual interment, were buried, segregated by city boroughs, in large common graves at the Ohlsdorf Cemetery.

Aunts Emma and Ella, spinster-ladies in their seventies, have agreed to give me room and board, at least for now. Who knows whether within they may have reservations about my intrusion into their lives, for they are so very private. Yet, good-hearted and willing to help, they graciously do their best to make me, a twenty-year-old whipper-snapper landing at their door steps, feel welcome.

Their flat is in a decrepit old tenement at Hochstrasse in Altona. At home we had always felt sorry that these refined ladies were living so poorly in a decaying building next to an abandoned brewery. During our occasional visits with them I had taken notice what somber, outdated dresses they were wearing, and how shabby their surroundings were. Now, however, I am grateful that they are offering me shelter, undoubtedly out of a sense of family loyalty.

The light button at the foot of the staircase turns on, with loud ticking, a timer controlling the faintest of illuminations, barely long enough to reach the flat on the third floor. Inside their unit it is pitch black for there is no electricity. When Emma hears me enter, she steps out of the kitchen to greet me, a kerosene lamp in her hand. The air is thick with the smells of kerosene, smoke from the coal stove, past meals, musty furniture and medicines. The glass window panes have long ago been blown out by bomb blasts, therefore, the casings are boarded up with lumber. The civil defense warden has skillfully installed a small patch of opaque plastic which admits a hint of daylight. Weather permitting, and when Aunt Emma is not complaining too bitterly about the draft, the door from the kitchen to the small balcony is left ajar a tiny crack.

The two old sisters have lived together all their lives. I remember that, when we visited them, they always seemed a bit ill at ease. Now Ella, small, wiry and determined, does all of the domestic chores and

what little cooking there is to be done on the old, poorly vented coal stove. She lives only for her ailing sister.

Aunt Emma, a few years younger, tall but stooped from age, is painfully fragile. She suffers from an incessant nasty cough that causes her to expectorate into a number of spittoons and ornate chamber pots located all over the flat. Each coughing fit is followed by a groan and a heart-rending sigh. As far as I can judge, Aunt Emma was in her younger years a talented, prolific painter. In addition to her many fine still lifes, she took great pleasure in reproducing, with the help of art books, the works of great masters. These copies were so well executed that only a connoisseur could distinguish them from the originals.

She no longer paints, but the two bedrooms of the flat, one of which I now occupy, are crammed with paintings of all sorts, some hanging on the walls, others piled up unframed, leaving little space to move around. Surrounded by canvases of Titian, Caravaggio, Canaletto, Holbein and Velasquez, it feels like sleeping in a museum. Paintings of hers used to grace the walls of our house for as long as I can remember.

Food, coal and kerosene are in desperately short supply; therefore, to preserve fuel, after finishing our modest evening meal there is nothing else to be done but to go to bed.

In the morning a brisk twenty-minute walk takes me to the St. Pauli Underground Station. Along the empty shells of bombed-out apartment buildings I pass the David Wache police station, at times the scene of brawling sailors being taken into custody. I hurry along the wide Reeperbahn Avenue where scores of night clubs and theaters attract sailors, soldiers and tourists. Underneath this wide avenue are enormous underground air raid bunkers, several stories deep, the safest in town. Throngs of people who have spent the night in the bunkers emerge from this underworld maze, blinking at the daylight. From the St. Pauli U-Station the train whisks the army of office workers to the city center, disgorging them at Adolf Hitler Platz or Central Station.

Our former office building, so solid and sturdy, had fallen prey to the fiery onslaught from the sky. Senor Pardo, a friend and countryman of Senor Vizcaino, deals in spices. He has agreed to rent us a spare room in his office as provisional quarters during this

emergency. Like my boss, he has delegated the day-to-day office duties to a German employee, Herr Breuer. At first he shows great reserve towards me, probably wondering why a young fellow like me is not serving his country in the army. Perhaps he guesses the reason but, be as it may, he is always very tactful. The experiences of my school days have made me apprehensive whenever I meet people for the first time; the more Nordic they look, the greater my unease. But once the ice is broken, I realize that I need not have worried about Herr Breuer; though a patriotic German, he is tolerant and fair-minded, and anything but a Nazi. Soon I am indebted to him for giving a rookie like me a helping hand with such novel chores as setting up a new bookkeeping system for my company, to replace the one that was destroyed. Poor health and fear of the air war keep my boss, Senor Vizcaino, in Bad Kissingen most of the time. He visits Hamburg only rarely to keep in touch with his customers now that he entrusted me with the conduct of his firm's business. To improve the food supply and to boost morale in these lean years, the government grants us import licences for citrus fruit and other Spanish food items.

I miss both my family and Simone, agonizing whether she may have survived the "catastrophe." Hammerbrook, the borough where she had spent the night after our tender encounter at my aunt's apartment, was completely destroyed, and thousands perished there in the firestorms. I don't know her relative's address and doubt that she has any way of contacting me. For the moment I can only wait and hope.

Except for the old aunts and me, the whole family is now living in Passau. Even Aunt Yvonne recently moved there; she teaches provisionally at a local high school, subject to approval by the Hamburg School Board, which is far from certain. At least for the moment she finds peace near her parents and two sisters.

I am so glad that this charming city has become a refuge and a place of healing for them. However, despite his age Opa misses having a home of his own and particularly the chance of practicing his profession, dentistry. His thoughts dwell with special affection on Strassburg, where he and Oma had spent the best years of their lives and raised their children. He is in correspondence with his former dental laboratory assistant who had remained there after the French

take-over in 1919. He owns a dental laboratory there, and his comments persuade Opa to give his former home town a second look.

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I keep putting off returning to the site where the house of my birth had stood. It has been six weeks since Mutti and I had escaped from its burning shell. I dread facing the scene of those frightful moments, but today muster up my courage to confront the ruin of our family residence. There is the front yard, so dear to me since childhood; Opa's shingle is all that remains. The walls of the house have collapsed, only the central heating pipes and elements eerily rise out of the debris. I poke around the rubble, vainly hoping to find some memento that may have escaped the destruction, perhaps even Opa's bronze bust, but the blaze has spared nothing.

Yet wait, the cellar remains intact! With the stairs gone it is a long way down, and it will be hard to climb out. But I chance crawling through the blown-out window and jump down into our old air raid shelter, dark and heavy with the acid stench of ash. A few soiled pillows and blankets are strewn about. I relive the terror that Mutti and I felt before we fled to safety. In the adjoining pantry, lo and behold, I spy three bottles of Rhine wine, bought last Christmas on rationing coupons! On the top shelf I also discover a few jars of Oma's delicious home-made apple jelly. Welcome as these things are, how absurd that they are all that remains of our home, of our way of life! I gather up my hoard in a pail from our old laundry room, draw the double bunk bed nearer the window and, with aching heart, precariously hoist myself out of the dank cellar into the bright daylight.

*****

It must be something special that makes Mutti phone me at the office.

"Please, Puedi, come to Passau, at least for a few days! Sonni has just returned for a ten-day furlough, and we are getting married next Saturday afternoon at 16 o'clock. Yes, October 8th." Mutti shouts excitedly into the receiver.

"Congratulations! I am delighted and would love to celebrate the wedding with you. But I am sorry I can't get away, especially with Senor Vizcaino in Bad Kissingen and Herr Riege out sick. In any case, I wouldn't be able to get a travel permit. You know how the slogan goes: "Erst siegen, dann reisen!" (First win the war, then travel). But I will be with you in my thoughts! My warm wishes on this happy occasion! Please write me all about it!"

A pity that I cannot attend; I am so happy for Mutti. She has not been very lucky in love, but she is crazy about Sonni, and he about her. I think becoming Frau Marquardt means a lot to her: married at last though having a twenty-year-old son! I also like Sonni a lot; he has always been very kind to me. Now in time of war it is a comforting feeling for young soldiers at the front to have a loving wife or sweetheart awaiting them back home.

Mutti must have looked lovely walking down the aisle of the small Lutheran chapel on the arm of the handsome serviceman, home for the wedding and a short honeymoon. Oma and Opa could not attend; they had just left Passau for Strassburg to investigate their chances of making a fresh start there. However, Mutti's sisters, brother-in-law, my cousins and a few friends witnessed the simple ceremony. Aunt Lotti takes credit for having conjured up, with help from Reiter Brothers' food market, a remarkably festive wedding meal. After a few days Sonni had to rejoin his battalion at the Russian front.

It is amazing with what persistence Opa is pursuing his dream to start up again a dental practice in Strassburg. I cannot understand his logic: the city's fate depends on the outcome of the war, in which the Allies are overwhelmingly favored. But my grandfather is stubborn; he is convinced that his age will protect him and Oma, come what may, even if the French retake the city. Mutti does not want to leave her old parents alone, so for better or for worse she gives up her modest foothold in Passau and follows them to her native city.

Aunt Yvonne is very much taken with the charm and the lovely surroundings of Passau. She immediately got a job at the local lyceum teaching French and English, for the need for teachers is great after the heavy influx of children evacuated from the North. A number of her colleagues are now teaching there with the approval of the Hamburg School Board, but her request for transfer was arbitrarily

denied. She considers this most unfair and vindictive, the kind of chicanery to which she had felt subjected for years. To compel her to return, the Board exerts pressure on the Bavarian Ministry of Education to dismiss her from her new teaching position, much to her anguish and resentment.

*****

I am very busy restarting our import business after the destruction of our office and records. In treatment at the sanatorium in Bad Kissingen, Mr. Vizcaino is relieved to have in me a dependable deputy, and we keep in regular contact with each other by telephone. There are import permits to apply for, orders to negotiate, shipments of oranges and lemons to clear through customs and sell to distributors on the Central Market. Since I have no social life to speak of, I don't mind working long hours and devoting all my energies to the job. At night I share a meager meal with my elderly aunts by the dim light of the kerosene lamp, then off to bed. It is the best place before the sirens spoil one's sleep. This tenement building has neither a cellar nor an air raid shelter. Aunt Emma is too frail to leave the flat, and in any case there is no public shelter within reach. Therefore, the two old ladies have no choice but to pull up their blankets and stay in bed during air alerts even if all hell breaks loose around them. I feel very sorry for them.

Since the devastating July attacks there has been a lull in the raids on Hamburg for the rest of 1943, except for a noontime attack on December 13. It was aimed at the city center and harbor district and caused much death and destruction. Otherwise the Royal Air Force and U. S. Air Force have been targeting other German cities.

The war grinds on with no end in sight and people are war-weary. The daring "Blitzkrieg," with which the Wehrmacht overran all of its enemies in a matter of days, is just a distant memory. The tide has turned; not only has Germany suffered bitter defeat on the Russian front but also in North Africa. The Luftwaffe keeps waging its air battle on Britain; in turn, our air space is defenseless against the deadly incursions of Allied bomber squadrons. Faith in the final victory, endlessly touted in Hitler's speeches, has all but vanished. Yet Nazi propaganda hints darkly at revolutionary miracle weapons

which will soon tip the fortunes of war in Germany's favor. I discount these claims but often despair how long it takes the Allies to launch their invasion, to create a second front to deliver a final blow to Hitler's reign.

Winter holds us in its grip, especially noticeable now when in place of the usual double window panes a few boards of lumber are all there is to keep out the bitter cold and the chalky dust blowing about from destroyed buildings. In the morning it takes real determination to get out of bed and wash up in the icy water of the wash basin.

Now with the air war intensifying again, I seek shelter in an enormous above-ground bunker. Cast of reinforced concrete it is far safer than the local basement shelters. But getting there takes a twelve-minute sprint through a no-man's-land of ruined apartment buildings, twelve minutes one often does not have because the bombs may already have started falling. At the start of a raid a few lead planes set brilliant flares. Bursting into cascades of more flares, "Christmas trees," as people call them, light up the sky and the ground below. Better run fast when you see these flares above you, for they serve as target markers for the bomber squadrons that follow. These arrive with a deafening roar, unloading their deadly cargo of bombs, which scream on their descent and shake the earth on impact. Also unnerving is the booming of the defending flak cannons all around and the shrapnel they scatter about. In the dark of night the formidable contour of the giant bunker looms ahead, but will there be time to reach its protection? There is nothing worse than getting caught in the stampede of a mob struggling to enter the bunker while the attack is already under way, creating panic, injuries and even death so close to safety.

At the massive steel doors the wardens yell at people to hurry, to move up faster on the pathway that rises in concentric circles through the bunker like the inside of a snail's shell. In the bunker people of all ages, harassed and exhausted, shuffle along, clutching their bundles, mothers carrying their babies. The ceiling is low, the air stale despite the ventilation system. With the benches along the wall always taken, one stands crushed against one's neighbors in a claustrophobic embrace.

There are bits of conversation, even an occasional jest, but generally everyone's attention is riveted on the "Drahtfunk" (cable radio), giving forecasts and updates of what is happening outside. Only the best shelters are equipped with this type of radio which cannot be monitored by enemy aircraft. The announcer's voice is so steady and unflappable that they nicknamed him "Herr Baldrian" (Mr. Valerian - so named after a traditional sedative).

He reports: "Medium-size formations of enemy aircraft have entered German air space over Osnabrueck and Oldenburg at 1:20 and 1:25 heading northeast. They are approaching Celle and are expected to reach our city limits within six minutes, unless a change of direction occurs."

It is a tense countdown and guessing game. Is Hamburg the intended target, or will the bombers veer off to strike Kiel, Luebeck or another destination? If they are coming our way, where will they drop their deadly cargo? These are anxious moments, people exchange glances, sigh, feel their hearts pounding, cling to their dear ones, some pray. The tension culminates when the radio announces that an attack is in progress, and if bombs fall nearby the ground shakes under their impact. Though protected by thick layers of reinformed cement, safer than most other shelters, one still feels that one's life is on the line. When eventually the "all clear" is given, people leave the bunker drained, wondering how their families, friends, home, neighborhood or work place may have fared. If there is fire or destruction in the neighborhood everyone lends a helping hand. At home the force of the explosions may have dislodged or blown the lumber out of the windows or done other damage. One fixes minor damage as best one can, otherwise straight to bed to catch a few winks before a new day breaks.

*****

Yvonne is no longer able to delay her return to Hamburg, compelled to leave Passau which she has come to love. The Walddoerfer School for Girls in the outskirts of Hamburg, where she was instructed to report, has no use for her. Resentful of having been uprooted in vain and ordered to report to a school which does not even need her services, she nonetheless obeys the Board's order to

report to the Heilwig School's evacuation camp in Wittstock. She feels arbitrarily and unfairly banished to this remote and monotonous small town surrounded by endless fields of beets and potatoes.

*****

Devastating news from Mutti in Strassburg: An officer has called on her at home to inform her that Sonni, her sweetheart of many years, yet husband of just four months, has been killed in action near Vitebsk.

I hurry to Mutti's side in Strassburg. She feels crushed; only time can heal the pain. My presence, though only for a few days, might help assuage her grief. Her small room is filled with photographs of Sonni, and of both of them together as a happy couple and from their engagement and wedding parties. There are also a few somber snapshots which the officer left with her: his grave covered by snow, a wooden cross, comrades firing a last salute. She keeps his letters neatly tied with a ribbon; there are more photos from the Russian front which he so hated. The pictures and precious memories are all that is left of a union not meant to outlast the war:

> Oh Strassburg, oh Strassburg
> you gracious city!
> within your walls
> many a soldier lies buried.

The soulful melody and the words of this lovely old local folk song echo in my head, connecting Sonni's untimely soldier's death to Mutti's native city.

WAR'S FORTUNES TURNING

Today, June 6, 1944, the long-anticipated Allied landing has started! The Fuehrer's Headquarters gloat over the heavy casualties which the Wehrmacht is inflicting on the Allied expeditionary forces on the beaches of Normandy, yet the allies succeed in holding on to their beachhead despite the fierce German defense. This is the springboard for liberating Western Europe from Hitler's iron grip, new hope that this beastly war will soon be over! Of course, for my family the invasion means that Strassburg will soon become French again. How could my grandparents have been so shortsighted! Why had they not, as family and friends had urged them, stayed in Passau where they had already made a modest start? But Opa, obstinate and nostalgic, would not listen.

Our Ministry of Propaganda is down-playing the importance of the Allied invasion and the emergence of a Western front. Instead it focuses its full attention on the revolutionary V-1 flying bombs which the Wehrmacht has just unleashed on London. Our newspapers emphasize the heavy damage and casualties which this long-expected miracle weapon is inflicting on the enemy. "We are avenging the destruction of our cities," gush our newspaper headlines. No doubt, spending day and night in the London Underground under constant V-1 bombardment must be terrible, but this new weapon will surely not change the outcome of the war.

Never before have I been so eager to know the truth about how the war is really proceeding than now, especially on the Western front where every Allied advance is a step toward ending the war. Listening to the Voice of America or the BBC is strictly "verboten" and very dangerous; defying this prohibition can easily land one in a concentration camp. At home with my aunts there is no chance of breaking the law, for they have neither electricity nor a radio. Petsch owns a "Volks-Empfaenger" (people's radio), but he is too scared to tune in foreign news broadcasts, all the more since he distrusts his landlady. One cannot be careful enough with whom one speaks about politics and the progress of the war. People are constantly admonished that it is their patriotic duty to report traitors and war defeatists to the authorities; such "enemies of the German people"

may mysteriously disappear, perhaps forever. The slogan "walls have ears" never rang truer. Yet, Puttchen is not deterred by these warnings and tunes in to foreign radio stations late at night despite heavy interference by our jammers, which make them very hard to understand. Since the jamming noise is very specific, it can easily be detected by those "good citizens" who spy on their neighbors. But Puttchen does not let this stop him; he therefore becomes my confidential source of war news from the other side.

AuntYvonne, cherishing the memories of her childhood, was very moved visiting her parents and her sister Trudi in Strassburg. A few weeks later, in a letter to her old aunts and me, she writes from the evacuation camp in Wittstock that she can no longer bear the stress this environment exerts on her. She has, therefore, sent a letter of resignation to her school principal despite warnings that such a step might be risky for a civil servant. Her letter concluded: "I have tried my best to persuade you that under these conditions I can no longer be the kind of teacher I must be to be true to myself. If my resignation is construed to be a hostile act, so be it. It may give the Board the long-awaited opportunity to punish me for my independent ways which have long been a thorn in its side."

*****

"The Fuehrer lives!" the newspapers write ecstatically that Hitler has survived unharmed an attempt made on his life at his headquarters. They cannot emphasize enough how outraged the German people feel about this monstrous crime against the nation. Apparently plotted for some time, most conspirators are high-ranking German army officers. The government purges all who had any connection with the plot. In a show trial Field Marshal von Witzleben and seven co-conspirators are condemned to death and promptly hanged. In my view, probably shared secretly by many Germans, these men were true patriots and heroes who risked their lives to topple the Nazi dictatorship. How many lives might have been saved had the bomb met its aim! Alas, a daring chance to shorten the war and deliver Germany and the world from this tyrant was lost!

Army Headquarters continues to glorify German victories, but the battles rage ever closer to the German heartland. One must learn to

read between the lines. Every Thursday when I meet Puttchen for lunch he whispers to me what he has learned from Allied broadcasts. The Soviets are driving the Wehrmacht out of their country, conquering the Baltic States and Romania and freeing Poland. In Normandy the Allies have enlarged their beachhead and pushed eastward. Two and a half months after the invasion Paris is liberated. I vividly remember the newsreels from four years ago showing Adolf Hitler marching down the Champs Elysees in triumph. On August 25, 1944, it is General Charles de Gaulle's turn to lead the Allied victory parade along this famous boulevard. What a miracle that the City of Lights has been spared the destruction that so many other European cities have suffered!

For the last two months the raids on Hamburg were horrendous, the British hitting us by night, the Americans by day. They must want to even the score for the attacks the V-1s unleashed on them, causing heavy casualties. On June 18 the bombing attack on our city has heavily damaged the prominent business section along the Moenckebergstrasse. At our office the windows were blown out and plaster walls ripped apart, but the building remained standing. The bombs also destroyed many cultural landmarks, museums and churches, among them the beloved old Sankt Jacobi.

Just on the way to work the alarm is sounding, and I seek shelter in the huge underground bunker below the Reeperbahn Avenue. What a mixture of people and languages from all over Europe, guest workers or others brought here probably against their will by the German occupiers! Italian, Turkish, Polish and Russian are among the tongues most commonly heard. Some of these foreign men have obviously taken up with lower class German women, making a mockery of the much heralded Nordic ethnic purity!

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Returning last night from the bunker, I noticed some bomb damage in our neighborhood and debris in the street, but tired from lack of sleep I crawled into my bed and dozed off immediately. Suddenly a thunderous blast, the din of collapsing walls and agonizing screams awakens me, and I am covered with chunks of broken plaster and boards of lumber. In the early light of daybreak I

stare in disbelief through almost impenetrable clouds of dust. My God, of the five-story apartment building right across the street only half remains, the other half is completely demolished! I hear Aunt Emma next door whimpering. She is bleeding from her forehead where an object must have struck her. Otherwise she and her sister seem unharmed, just very frightened like everyone else. Our apartment is in shambles, and there are cracks all over the walls.

What was it? It must have been a time bomb dropped during the attack earlier in the night. I bring Aunt Emma a towel to soak up the blood from a gash to her forehead, and run down the staircase to see whether I can be of help. The fire brigade rescues those who can still be saved. By mid-morning 17 persons are treated for minor injuries, 8 rushed to hospitals, 6 are dead and 11 missing.

*****

It is a year since I moved in with my aunts. They are kind to me in their own, old-maid ways. I have learned to love them and respect their courage to endure all hardships so stoically. They are poor, have lived in their little flat a long time and have nowhere else to go. For me it has not been an easy year either: the grim surroundings, the poor living conditions, Aunt Emma's constant cough and always being on the run from the bombs. After last week's time-bomb explosion I am determined to try at all cost to find a furnished room in the outskirts, away from the harbor area, always a strategic target.

What if I talked about it with Herr Reifegerste, vice president of my former employer Otto Bensel Express A.G? I see him at times on business since my company is a long-time customer of his firm. From the start he has always been exceptionally nice to me even though he knows all about my background. He lives in a house of his own in Wellingsbuettel, a peaceful suburb in the Alster Valley, about half an hour by train. Perhaps there is someone in his neighborhood who might have a spare room to rent.

"Funny that you should bring it up at this time. The Wohnungsamt (housing authority) has been after my wife to rent out the attic we use for storage. It is tiny and only partially furnished. We dislike the thought of taking strangers into our home, but I believe that my wife would not object to renting it to someone reliable like

you whom I have known for years. If we work things out among ourselves and you are living with us next time the Wohnungsamt checks, they will probably not contest it. But I must warn you, the room is tiny, and I don't know how comfortable you would feel there."

"I am certainly not demanding, especially not after what I have been going through in Altona. To tell you the truth, having a chance to move into your small attic sounds like a dream. May I drop by Saturday afternoon after work to have a look and meet Frau Reifegerste?"

A week later I move with my few belonging into their attic. True enough, it is tiny, and the walls are so slanted on one side that I must bend down to avoid bumping my head. But how wonderful to live in the suburbs, in a room with electricity, central heating and even a small sink with running water! And a window with real glass rather than one boarded up with lumber, with a view into the neat little garden below. Now in war-time, flower beds have, of course, given way to rows of vegetables: carrots, potatoes and tomatoes. No more need to run every night to that miserable bunker! In the outskirts people are not as fearful of air alerts. However, even here when the roar of incoming bombers fills the sky and a major attack appears imminent, we gather for greater safety in the residential air raid shelter.

DOOMED

Aunts Emma and Ella assure me that they fully understand that I am leaving them to lead a less harried life. They wish me well and say they are sorry to see me go. They have been good to me, but perhaps they may also welcome the chance to regain their privacy. As it happens this is of short duration: Aunt Yvonne is returning to Hamburg after a month of teaching at the children's evacuation camp in Wittstock. When she calls on the old ladies they invite her to stay with them until the Board reacts to the letter of resignation she submitted to her school principal. She has just been instructed to report to a ladies' auxiliary affiliated with the Party to perform menial work like sewing and mending. This is obviously a slap in the face for a skilled teacher with years of experience, but she complies with the order to avoid the impression of disobeying the Board. Now that she is back in town I again become a regular Sunday visitor with her and the old aunts in Altona.

Yvonne is charged with insubordination; she was repeatedly summoned and has appeared before the School Board officials. They are bent on breaking what they consider her defiant spirit. She is also being charged with having made remarks to fellow teachers and students that are considered subversive and unbecoming to a teacher serving the Third Reich. Such rebelliousness cannot go unchallenged, so the Board argues, otherwise what is to stop other teachers from defying its authority.

"Harry, have you heard from Yvonne?" Aunt Ella's voice, unaccustomed to using a telephone, sounds faint and anxious.

"Yesterday she went for another hearing at the School Board. We are worried because she has not come home. Let's hope nothing bad has happened to her."

"Did she say whom she was to meet? Let's see, the names I remember are Luethje, Behne and von Wedel?"

"Well, all of those names sound familiar; I just don't think she mentioned whom she was seeing yesterday."

"I shall try to find out what happened to her, Aunt Ella, and will see you if I have anything to report. Maybe she just stayed over with her friend Kaete in Borstel."

At the School Board I ask for Chief Counsel von Wedel. I am referred to his assistant, Herr Schenk.

"Yes," he coolly replies to my anxious query, "The Chief Counsel is handling the case. You need to get all information about her from him."

I give him my business telephone number in the hope that von Wedel will call me but wait all day in vain. Now next day near noon Herr Schenk phones me.

"Herr Mewes, Chief Counsel von Wedel will not be able to see you. But he asked me to inform you that your aunt has been placed in protective custody at the state prison in Fuhlsbuettel. That's all I can tell you. Heil Hitler!"

I am crestfallen; when Yvonne had failed to return home we all feared that something bad must have happened to her. Now this! Will we be permitted to visit her? Obviously the Board wants to teach her a lesson and show her who is in command. Hopefully she will be released soon!

It is Saturday afternoon; I have finished my work and am taking the suburban train to Fuhlsbuettel. The package which Aunt Ella has prepared for Yvonne contains a few personal belongings, a sweater and a blanket, for the September nights are already chilly. At the station I ask for directions. As often as I had passed here on my way to work, I never knew that there was a prison. No one from our family or circle of friends has ever been incarcerated.

A lot of people are lined up in front of the bleak prison complex. The uniformed guard in the sentry box at the gate asks whether Yvonne Mewes is "a civil or political detainee." Since I don't know the answer he silently motions me in the direction of a guard seated at a table. He looks for her name on two separate rosters and laconically says "Gestapo detainee M-1831." My heart sinks when I hear into whose hands she has fallen. The guard inspects the contents of my package, and after tying it up again jots in bold letters her name and number on it. In answer to my question he grumbles: "No visitors or mail allowed! For further information contact Hamburg Gestapo Headquarters."

Aunts Emma and Ella are as mortified as I am by the terrible news. Everybody has heard horror stories about people who have never been heard of after the Gestapo had gotten hold of them. Why had Yvonne been so outspoken and uncompromising in everything she did! What's to be done now? I must contact the School Board again: the officials who had her arrested are, no doubt, the ones we must ask to have her released. From the office I phone Mutti in Strassburg to give her the frightening news. Opa, as Yvonne's father and head of the family, known and respected in Hamburg, must write to her school principal and enlist his help to have her set free. It is one thing to bring disciplinary action against a teacher, but another to deliver her into the hands of the Gestapo, soiled with so much blood!

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Between our military communiques and the foreign newscasts, it is hard to keep track just where the Western front line is. But it is clear that the Allies are closing in on Strassburg, and I anguish what may happen to Mutti and my grandparents. It can't take much longer than a week before the city falls into Allied hands, yet Opa seems unyielding in his decision to stay. He refuses to leave his new homestead for the safety of Germany.

"Let's be realistic," I argue with him on the telephone. "If it made sense for you to leave Alsace in 1919, it should make even more sense to do so now after all that Hitler has unleashed on the world." Opa insists that he has nothing to fear when the French return. "I have a lot of friends in Strassburg. Here I have my home and my practice! Let Trudi cross the Rhine bridge! Hermine and I will stay!"

His obstinacy puts Mutti in a quandary: as a devoted daughter she does not wish to leave her old parents alone. What can I say to shake her resolve? I fear that after a long, bitter war, the victors may not handle German nationals with kid gloves!

*****

Chief Counsel von Wedel won't receive me in person but says to me on the telephone: "The public prosecutor has brought charges against your aunt for breach of contract, among others. This is very

serious, especially in times of war. She is a very obstreperous person and has ignored all of our warnings. The matter is now out of our hands. It is up to the court to decide."

I plead with him to help free my aunt who is like a second mother to me, but my words fall on deaf ears.

"When is a verdict expected?"

"Hard to tell; these things take time."

*****

The BBC claims that their Spitfires and anti-aircraft guns are at last able to shoot down the V-1 flying bombs which for months have raised havoc in England. Now our High Command proudly announces the launching of an even more effective new weapon: a rocket-bomb called V-2, said to travel at the speed of sound. Against it, they claim, there is no defense.

I had always dismissed the prediction of new wonder weapons as Nazi propaganda, as part of psychological warfare. Who would have thought that after all these years of war there really was an arsenal of formidable new weapons in the making! Can these at this late date alter the military equation? The invasion of Normandy and the Allied advance had raised expectations that Germany's defeat was imminent. Yet the war rages on with no end in sight.

*****

Opa sent a letter on Yvonne's behalf from Strassburg to Dr. Luethje, the director of the Heilwig School. In it he speaks of the hardships which the family had endured when, as patriotic Germans, they left their home in Alsace in 1919. Now, once again, he as well as his daughter Yvonne lost everything, this time to the flames of the air war, a loss which deeply affected Yvonne's emotions. He speaks of the high demands she always made on herself as a teacher, and gives her frustration to be unable to live up to these demands as the reason for her resignation. Opa ends his letter with an appeal to Dr. Luethje to do whatever in his power to have his daughter, a dedicated teacher and a wonderful human being, released. I hope it will move

Dr. Luethje to use his influence with the School Board on behalf of my beloved aunt!

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The Allies have retaken Strassburg and the post office returned my last letter, marked "No Service." In spite of our urgent pleas, my stubborn grandfather could not be persuaded to leave the city. The Allied advance sealed his fate along with Mutti's and Oma's. Yvonne, the daughter closest to him intellectually and emotionally confronts, like he probably does, great uncertainties. Along with wonderful minds, both are endowed with strong wills which now bear on their destinies.

Every other Saturday I line up at the prison gate to drop off a small hoard of food which the aunts and I have saved up for her. It reminds me of how, years ago in Barcelona, I had watched those downtrodden women and children deliver food to their relatives held at the Montjuich Prison. Little did I know then that I might some day be standing in line on a similar mission.

More than three months have gone by since my aunt was incarcerated, and her detention drags on without any sign of progress. I have contacted and pleaded with everybody at her school, the Board and the court who may have anything to do with her case. To my surprise, Herr Heinz, from the public prosecutor's office, informs me that the court dismissed the suit against her some time ago due to insufficient cause to convict her. This sounds hopeful but has so far not helped her gain her freedom. On the contrary, some school officials recommended placing her for an additional month in a re-education camp "to teach her obedience."

Vindictive as this attitude may be, the School Board remains our only hope, and we are requesting an urgent meeting with the Chief Counsel. This time he grants Aunt Ella and me an interview at his office. He does not appear the ogre I had pictured him in my mind: he is just an undistinguished, rigid, dour functionary in his fifties, bent on doing his job as he interprets it. He receives Aunt Ella and me correctly; she looks so anguished and forlorn, as always dressed in black. After leafing through the thick folder in front of him he concedes that even he finds Yvonne's long incarceration by the

Gestapo troubling. Among the papers on his desk I recognize the letter that Opa had written to Dr. Luethje pleading for help.

"Yes, she has been in there a long time. Already two months ago we had requested her transfer to a labor board re-education facility, but the Gestapo has so far failed to turn her over. I will ask the Reichs-Statthalter (federal governor) to personally intercede in this matter, to see to it that the Gestapo releases her from protective custody." He nods reassuringly and shows us to the door.

We feel encouraged. The Board appears to have second thoughts about its earlier severity and now seems to want Yvonne released. Christmas is just a week away. Based on the appeal for the Governor's intervention, with some luck she might be with us for the holidays.

"Perhaps even for her forty-fourth birthday on December 22th," Ella dares suggest with a faintly hopeful gleam in her tired old eyes.

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After the Allied landing at the coast of Normandy on June 6, 1944, I was sure that the war would be over by year's end! True, the Allies have accomplished a lot, liberated Paris, and in parts of the front are already battling on German soil. But who would have thought that the Wehrmacht would still be able to offer such resistence in Belgium and Holland, and keep punishing Britain, first with the V-1 and now the V-2s. Hitler wants the fatherland defended to the last drop of blood by a people's army, recruited of old men unfit for army service as well as young boys. On Sundays, local school yards become para-military training grounds for an odd lot of these would-be defenders, the "Volkswehr" (people's defense). Deep within we all know that these heroics are measures of desperation, that the war is lost even if the inevitable defeat can be postponed a bit longer.

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What a sad holiday season! With Strassburg reverted to France, our family scattered about and incommunicado, Aunt Lotti's greetings from Passau fill me with memories of happier family holidays. On

the first Christmas day as I visit the old ladies, there is barely enough coal for preparing a meal, much less for fighting off the biting cold. I share with them a few small treats which Lotti mailed me. We had obviously deluded ourselves in expecting Yvonne's immediate release. The morning of December 31, the last day of 1944, is punctuated by a heavy air raid, seemingly aimed at the naval shipyards. New Year's Eve Petsch and I gather at Puttchen's flat, sipping the wine I had salvaged from the cellar of our destroyed house. We toast to peace in early 1945!

Yvonne is no longer in Fuhlsbuettel, so the guard tells me at the prison gate when I try to deliver a small package on the Saturday after New Year's Day! The roster shows that she was discharged on December 25th, but where to? I am terrified. What happened to her? Where was she sent? We had expected to welcome her home momentarily. The guard shrugs his shoulders. Always the same litany:

"Contact Gestapo Headquarters for information."

This is one thing I cannot bring myself to do; it would seem sheer madness for me to call attention to myself. Monday morning I try to reach von Wedel at the School Board to determine her whereabouts.

"We don't know any more where she is than you do," Herr Schenk replies indifferently. "Dr. von Wedel is out of town. I will ask him to investigate and call you after he returns."

*****

"Yvonne is dead! They have killed her!"

Aunt Ella sobs uncontrollably into the telephone. She tries to explain how she received the devastating news but is too upset to do so. I hurry to their flat as fast as I can.

"Here are her ashes! That's all that is left of our poor Yvonne!"

Ella points to a half-open red clay urn standing in the middle of the kitchen table; some of the ashes have spilled into the carton which the mailman delivered this morning. Enclosed was also a death certificate issued on January 6, 1945, by the office of vital statistics of Ravensbrueck, and a form stating that she had died of heart failure.

Ravensbrueck - I remember hearing the name from Yvonne's friend Else, a newspaper editor who spent four months at what she

described as a horrible concentratiom camp for women. So that is where the Gestapo sent Yvonne to her death!

The old ladies and I sit grief-stricken and in tears by the kitchen table, facing the urn containing our beloved Yvonne's mortal remains. Words fail us to express the deep sorrow we feel in our hearts and the anger toward those responsible for her untimely death. Heart failure! A healthy woman in the prime of her life, who hiked and bicycled all over the country! What outrageous lies the Gestapo murderers invent to cover up their crimes! What tortures and indignities may our beloved Yvonne have had to endure during the four months in prison in the hands of her tormentors, and how did they cause her death within ten days from arrival at the camp?

As the afternoon wears on we share with each other the many precious memories of her. What a crucial role she, my closest and favorite aunt, my spiritual mentor, played throughout my life! I owe her so much for helping me distinguish right from wrong, opening my eyes to the wonders of nature, introducing me to the glories of music and art. What pains she took to help me throughout my school days, and what a wonderful friend and adviser she always was to me, full of idealism, nobility and love!

With communication to Strassburg cut, at least I do not have to break the tragic news of her death to her parents just yet, especially not to Opa to whom she was so close!

A month later a handful of those who loved her gather by her grave to lay her ashes to rest in the Ohlsdorf Cemetery. The headstone bears the inscription "Why"?

We will never know just how Yvonne died, but her message is clear: "Live life with courage and rectitude, and strive to remain true to yourself!" While most people cowered before the might of the police state, few dared to speak out against the evil and madness that had gripped Germany. Yvonne lived and died without making demeaning compromises. Had more of her countrymen chosen to resist Hitler's rule and stood up against Nazi tyranny, they might have saved their nation and its soul.

SURRENDER

On the Western front the Wehrmacht's ability to challenge the Allies in the Ardennes with a powerful counteroffensive takes everyone by surprise. It is repelled only after weeks of fierce battle at a staggering cost in human lives on both sides. Now the Allied onslaught on the German heartland becomes unstoppable. In the East the Soviets have regained the occupied regions of their war-torn homeland. Pushing deep into East Prussia they complete the stranglehold on Germany. Allied bombers dominate our air space virtually unopposed, laying waste to Germany's proud cities. After destroying much of Berlin and Cologne, now beautiful Dresden, jewel of baroque and rococo architecture, has become the latest victim of the merciless air war. More than 40,000 of its inhabitants are believed to have perished. Here in Hamburg the sirens keep us on the run day and night with their wailing, even when raids are aimed at other cities. But all too often Hamburg, with its port and industry, is targeted in order to deny our armed forces the necessary ammunition and fuel. Black smoke from burning refineries billows to the sky.

Life becomes harder and meaner every day. We must tighten our belts since our skimpy four weeks' rations were reduced and have to last us an additional week. So far I had managed to eat on rationing coupons at restaurants near the Central Station, but now these have closed down for lack of food and fuel. At home I store my bread in a bread box: one slice in the morning and one in the evening, no matter how much the stomach growls. Once in a while the Reifegerstes let me partake of a plate of stew or a spoonful of home-made marmalade. The house is unheated for lack of coal, therefore, I virtually live in my suit and coat. Often I simply go to bed and pile on all my clothing on top of me to stay warm.

Everyone follows the latest war news intensely. Wehrmacht Headquarters' bulletins still try to prop up the morale by hinting at more secret weapons on the way and new defense strategies in the making. Heroic rhetoric to the sound of military marches exhorts all good Germans to fight the enemy to the end. But as defenses crumble and the Allied armies are fast advancing on all fronts, people realize that the war is irretrievably lost. Streams of exhausted refugees are

everywhere, especially in the railway stations: distraught women, children and old people clutching their few possessions. Bombed out or fleeing from advancing enemy forces, especially the dreaded Red Army, they bed down anywhere or line up for hours at soup kitchens, hoping to be fed. When, less than two years ago, our home destroyed, we were traveling south on a refugee train, there had been a genuine outpouring of sympathy. Now, with so much of the country in ruins and enemy troops at the gates, little of that compassion remains.

We all wonder: will Hamburg be besieged, embattled or bombed from the air into submission? Our Hanseatic sister city of Bremen has already fallen to the British after a short token resistance. Allied armies are pushing north through the Lueneburg Heath; our "People's Defense" irregulars and scattered elements of the Wehrmacht are rumored to be engaging them with artillery fire near Harburg, about 10 kilometers from Hamburg's center. What chance do they have of holding the victors at bay? Let our city fathers for once ignore the shrill voices of deluded super-patriots to fight the enemy to the end, and instead spare people's lives and homes!

The suburban train service is haphazard and there are few riders. Most people stay at home awaiting what lies ahead. The radio is our remaining life-line. In the past my hosts had been far too discrete to discuss with me current events or their radio-listening habits. Now they drop all pretensions and openly tune in any station within reach, German or one of those forbidden foreign ones. Together we listen spellbound to the foreign announcers' claims: "Hitler died in Berlin by his own hand!" "American and Russian troops meet south of Berlin!" "The Russians have encircled Berlin!" "The Duce executed!" "Germany's capitulation imminent!" Is this all true or are these fabrications to hasten Germany's surrender? Our local station continues to transmit military marches and calls for courage in the impending battle for the city. Judging from the sounds of artillery fire from the south the fight has already begun.

An important bulletin is expected momentarily keeping us glued to the radio. Is it over, I ask myself, Hitler's infamous dictatorship and the horrendous war into which he plunged the world? The music turns somber, then there is the announcement: "Our beloved Fuehrer died last night a hero's death in his Berlin bunker. Admiral Doenitz,

his successor as commander-in-chief, will head the vigorous defense of our fatherland to the end."

Though the war is not yet officially over and, in fact, cannon fire is heard at a distance, I feel exhilarated, relieved and grateful for having survived Hitler's reign of terror. In its course this fanatic and his followers sent millions of soldiers and innocent civilians of many nations to their untimely graves, and reduced formerly proud cities, including part of our own, to rubble.

Berlin has indeed surrendered to the Russians. Here at home, Karl Kaufmann, Hamburg's federal governor, calls off the fight for the city to spare the lives of the civilian population. He refers to the war as a national catastrophe for Germany and a misfortune for Europe. Some military officers and Party holdouts call Kaufmann's proclamation an act of treason, but by afternoon Admiral Doenitz, representing the German government, declares Hamburg an open city and orders its surrender. Negotiations with the British High Command are in progress for their forces to begin the occupation tomorrow, May 3, 1945, at 13 o'clock.

We are all confined to our homes while the British forces are seizing control of the city. Edicts by the occupiers are read over the radio and bulletins pasted on the walls. A dusk-to-dawn curfew is imposed until further notice. Essential services including streetcars and suburban trains will resume. Again we come to depend on the radio for information and important announcements: fresh voices and newscasts replace Dr. Goebbels' odious propaganda apparatus. The newscasters recount Hitler's last hours, his wedding to Eva Braun, their suicides and those of some of his lieutenants in their bunker. There are details about the fall of Berlin, the surrender of the last Wehrmacht units in Germany, Denmark and the Netherlands. The Nazi Party is at long last dissolved, gone is the hated "Heil Hitler" salute, and Hamburg's Adolf Hitler Platz in the heart of the city regains its old and beloved name "Rathausmarkt."

With business activity at a standstill and no reason for going into town, I walk, lost in thought, through the rolling hills of the Alster Valley. A wintry chill still lingers, but the buds of the oak and linden trees signal the return of spring, bringing renewal and hope. The fear and sense of humiliation which has been with me all these years have at last been lifted. How tragic that Yvonne had to lose her life just

months before the end! Now my main concern is how my loved ones are faring under French rule.

Hamburg is bustling with British soldiers in their khaki uniforms. At the Central Station they are busy erecting an information booth and a military post office. Their MPs join forces with German police directing the traffic of British military convoys. The city's population, absorbed with matters of daily subsistence, goes about its business without paying much attention to the occupation forces. Haggard and dispirited, people form long lines in front of bakeries and grocery stores in the cold, rainy weather. Everybody is hungry, for with the country's collapse communications and food distribution have all but broken down. The city is overrun with refugees, soldiers discharged from the army, foreign laborers and freed POWs.

THE AFTERMATH

A week ago Germany surrendered and the Allies celebrated their hard-won victory. For the average German, the country defeated, the cities in ruin, millions dead, the only consolation is that at least the killing and destruction have ended and time will heal the wounds. Those of us who have loathed Hitler's dictatorship and all it stood for, feel relieved that the long nightmare has ended. My relatives and close friends, especially Petsch and Puttchen, hug and congratulate me, aware of how precarious my situation has been.

The magnitude of Nazi crimes against humanity is just emerging as news about millions of victims, killed in extermination camps, horrify the world. Hitler's race laws, stripping Jews of their human and civil rights, led to their deportation to so-called "resettlement zones" in Eastern Europe, in itself an indignity. However, according to the latest revelations about "the final solution to the Jewish question," the term "resettlement" was nothing but a cynical cover-up for their systematic, cold-blooded murder in gas chambers and crematoria at Auschwitz-Birkenau and scores of other extermination camps. Confronting their past, the German people realize that, by blindly following Hitler's orders, they unwittingly enabled the Gestapo and their henchmen to carry out horrendous crimes. It is no wonder that the world considers them collectively guilty, even though many honorable, fair-minded Germans had rejected the Nazi dictatorship; in fact many, including Yvonne Mewes, paid with their lives for their opposition. But the world community is too outraged by the atrocities now coming to light to distinguish between guilty or innocent Germans. Besides, Hitler's Germany had plunged the world into this devastating war, at the cost of millions of lives, reason enough to condemn its people as a whole.

True enough, everyone in Germany was aware that concentration camps existed; they had indeed a terrible reputation. But like I, a majority of ordinary Germans did not know nor would have suspected the government of their cultured nation to sink so low as to systematically murder millions of Jews, political opponents and other "undesirables" in gigantic death factories. Despite the virulent anti-Semitic campaign, the Nazi's claim that they were relocating Jews to

Poland, known for having a large Jewish population, appeared plausible. Most camps were located in remote, sparsely populated areas, and all who were connected to these crimes were committed to secrecy. To preserve one's self-image as a decent human being, who would avow to family and friends to mercilessly killing, gassing and cremating millions of innocent people in extermination camps?

Denazification is under way and prominent Party leaders are taken into custody. Many of them will have to stand trial for the atrocities they committed or instigated. Unfortunately those at the very top, Hitler, Goebbels and Himmler, have beaten the rap by committing suicide, thus escaping retribution for their crimes.

Where have all the staunch Party members and the fellow travelers gone, the flag wavers and the "Sieg Heil" yellers, the believers in "The Thousand Years' Reich" and the champions of "the Aryan master race?" Today nobody owns up to having cheered Hitler's call for his "New World Order." These days all claim to having been duped, joined the Party only to hold on to their jobs and were just following orders!

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The British military government rules by a steady stream of edicts. The nightly curfew has been eased; now lasting from 21 o'clock evenings to 6 o'clock in the morning makes life easier. A particularly unpopular order requires every male who was not bombed out to donate either a suit, a coat or a pair of shoes. This mandatory collection is ordered to cloth the countless ragtag foreign workers and POWs about to leave Germany for their homelands. Parting with one's personal clothing is tough after six years of war and shortages. People especially grumble that the collection is for the benefit of foreign workers at a time when the city is overflowing with needy German refugees, but the order is strictly enforced.

Another of Field Marshall Montgomery's decrees mandates that there is to be no close personal contact between British soldiers and German civilians. Large "no fraternizing" posters appear wherever British soldiers gather. Yet young servicemen are already exchanging eager glances and smiles with pretty "Fraeuleins" strolling along the

shores of the Alster these sunny days. Who will win out in this contest, youth and spring time or the Field Marshall's order?

I long to start a new life elsewhere, free from the memories of the past, probably in America. Our family scattered, our home gone, my job at a standstill, there is little that ties me to war-ravaged Hamburg. Once railroad service resumes I must be on my way and find my loved ones in Strassburg. The uncertainty about their fate leaves me no peace.

My life is lonely. I blame much of it on the mandates of the Nuremberg Laws, but my retiring nature is also a factor, allowing myself few encounters aside from Simone. I remain in loose contact with a few classmates from my gymnasium days, especially Heinz, a Mischling like me whose father vanished during the deportations. It had shocked and deeply concerned me when, just months before the war ended, he and other half-Jews were drafted into forced labor details, assigned to hazardous, back-breaking salvage work, often alongside POWs or concentration camp inmates. I too had feared receiving my draft notice in the mail but was again, as often throughout these terrible years, fortunate to have been passed over.

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World War II has officially ended. On June 26, 1945, fifty nations sign a United Nations Charter in San Francisco, giving hope for a juster and more peaceful world. A month later, meeting at Potsdam, the Allies confer control over Germany to a four-power Allied Control Council; it draws up the U.S., British, French and Soviet zones of occupation. President Truman, Premier Stalin and Prime Minister Churchill issue an ultimatum to Japan: accept immediate unconditional surrender or face total destruction. Dropping atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nakasaki strikes terror in the hearts of our former allies of the Berlin-Tokyo Axis, closing this chapter of history with their surrender.

THE SEARCH

Germany surrendered three months ago, yet the country is still without long-distance passenger train service. Tired of waiting any longer I decide to try my luck by whatever means possible, even if I have to hike. My friends and the old aunts bid me farewell; Senor Pardo, whose office my firm is sharing, agrees to look after his countryman's business interests, dormant for now, until Senor Vizcaino makes other arrangements. My landlord allows me to leave a few personal belongings in his attic. The knapsack Puttchen gave me for the trip contains my week's bread ration, a change of clothes and, most importantly, my entire hoard of cigarettes, the universal currency these days. I board an early suburban train to Hamburg's Central Station. My mind is set on distant horizons, yet as I leave I cast a last fond look on the familiar sights and landmarks of my native city. When will I see them again?

Luck has it that a local train is about to leave for Hannover. The platform is filled to capacity, but after much pushing and shoving I find myself in a compartment crushed against a crowd of temperamental Italians, homeward bound, with over 1,000 kilometers to go. The train stops at every little village, discharging or taking on local folks. It is hot, noisy and uncomfortable. At last, to everyone's relief, we pull into Hannover, the train's destination. The railroad station looks like one enormous campground. Like hundreds around me, I bed down for the night on my blanket, resting my head on the back pack. The civil defense sirens wail, announcing the start of the curfew.

The fellow next to me on the floor, a congenial army veteran from Munich, is experienced in riding freight trains.

"I don't bother any more fighting my way into mobbed passenger compartments when I can instead have practically a whole freight car to myself," he says.

After today's tiring trip I am willing to give freight trains a try; at the crack of dawn I follow my companion to the freight yard. Several rough-and-ready-looking fellows are gathered about the freight cars of a supposedly south-bound train; we join them, sprawling out on the floor. I admit that, except for the dust and musty smell of potatoes, it

is a great improvement over standing for hours in a crammed passenger compartment. The railroad workers are rather tolerant these days of freeloaders like us, and help us pick cars going in the right direction. After the freight cars are at length switched to and fro we are at last rumbling south. Through the open door I see the gentle hills and peaceful towns of the Weserbergland with their graceful steeples.

I chat with my buddy from Munich and trade a few of my cigarettes for an occasional swig from his schnapps bottle; the swaying of the train and the dimness of the freight car make me doze off for a while. Around noon the train pulls into a freight yard. Somebody says we are near Goettingen. Our car is shunted onto a secondary rail and disconnected. As we get off, a south-bound train with chemical tank cars is ambling by on the adjoining track; a few riders cling to the ladders at the front and rear of each car. There is no time to waste; following my companion's example I hoist myself up while the train is still moving along slowly. With no place to sit, I haphazardly hold on to one of the wagon's steel ladders, my knapsack on my back. The train now hurtles along at full speed, clattering noisily as I cling to the ladder ever more tightly. The steady rain now falling makes the ride ever more miserable. If only I had not jumped on so impulsively, I reproach myself, hanging on for dear life while my hands are getting stiff and sore. Next time I will stick with passenger or freight trains, I resolve with remorse. Past Bebra the confounded train slows to a creep, and a train man flags the locomotive to stop. Riding the train the way we are doing is strictly "verboten," he barks at us, and drives us off our precarious perches. I am grateful that his scolding brings this miserable and scary ride to an end.

The Bavarian, tougher and more determined than I am, is already plotting where to catch the next freight train to take him closer to home. I, in turn, look for an inn to spend the night, wash off the soot and grime and try to get something to eat. I hike about three kilometers on the nearby highway to the outskirts of Bebra. American military trucks and soldiers on foot are passing by; it's the first time that I see "Amis" (Americans). They seem far more relaxed and fun-loving than the "Tommies," their British counterparts. Judging from the way some of them, both white and black, walk hand

in hand and carry on with pretty Fraeuleins in Dirndl dresses. I wonder whether anyone around here has ever heard of the "no fraternizing" policy. To my relief I find lodging and a meal in a small inn; here in the countryside life seems so much easier than in the large cities.

Clean and rested I get up shortly after dawn. Chatting over breakfast with the innkeeper about my plans to go to Strassburg, he tells me about a local furniture mover serving the South. With so few trains running, some of his guests strike up deals with the drivers for rides on their moving trucks, space permitting. Sounds like a wonderful idea, certainly worth a try! Yes, a moving truck is just being loaded with cargo for Darmstadt, half a day's trip in the right direction.

"How much is it worth it to you?" the wily trucker asks me.

"Whatever the train charges."

"Yes, and then some. Got anything else, coffee, schnapps, American cigarettes?"

"Not American, but how about two packs of German Junos."

"Make it four and you got yourself a deal. I am full up-front, but you'll be very comfortable stretching out on the of floor the truck."

What choice do I have? I hand him ten marks and four packs of cigarettes, making a large dent in my hoard. This done, his helper unlocks the rear door of the moving van and shows me where to lie down on a heap of quilts. He closes and padlocks the gate from the outside. At first I feel uneasy, imprisoned in darkness as this stuffy moving van speeds and bounces along the highway. To my relief the driver does not forget me when taking a break. What a relief to see the sky and catch fresh air again! Around 14 o'clock, in the early afternoon, on arrival in Darmstadt they free me from my confinement. I stand there blinking at the sun, stiff and feeling a bit nauseated, but happy to be about two thirds of the way to Strassburg. With a few daylight hours left, I hurry to the railroad station to see whether I can push my luck still further. And soon I find myself on a passenger train to Karlsruhe. Though slow and crowded, I am lucky to find a seat when a lady gets off with her three children in Wertheim. The picturesque towns, forests and vineyards of this scenic area are a feast for the eyes. The journey ends in Karlsruhe near curfew time.

My savvy Bavarian travel companion of two days ago had recommended bedding down for the night in sleeping compartments of express trains. As our train pulls into the station I observe on what tracks some of those cars are standing; but to my disappointment they are locked. Just as I resign myself to spending another night in the bedlam of the railway station, I notice two fellows entering a second class car of a local train. I follow their example and come upon an inviting compartment where I can stretch out on an upholstered bench. Dozing off I count my blessings for having avoided the crowds and chaos at the station.

I awake with a jolt; it is the impact of the locomotive being connected to the train, ready for a new day's work. I hurriedly reach for my belongings and jump off the accelerating train. At the station I hear a variety of languages and dialects spoken, both German and foreign. To my surprise I am able to understand a little of the local dialect, for it resembles the German spoken in Baden and Alsace which Mutti sometimes used with Oma and my aunts. I also hear Italian and French. The station is jointly patrolled by German police and French MPs, so I must be in the French Occupation Zone.

A train is to leave for Offenburg in roughly an hour; this leaves me time to freshen up and finish what remains of my stale bread. The train is on time and the boarding orderly. Most passengers in the compartment are homeward-bound Italians and French soldiers going on furlough. In fact, France is only a few kilometers west from here across the Rhine. The thought of getting closer to my loved ones thrills me. How much I long to see them! From earlier visits to Strassburg I know that I have to change trains in Appenweier.

Here the station master dashes my enthusiasm: "Forget about Strassburg, young man! There hasn't been train service for a year, ever since the city became French. And France is, of course, off-limits to German nationals. The French Army is running a few military trains a week across the Rhine, and that is all."

His words leave me numb; this possibility had never occurred to me. Sitting on the platform I stare at the rails. Have I burnt my bridges in Hamburg and come this far for nothing? I have too much at stake to give up on my goal without even trying my luck.

Outside the small railroad station a yellow postal bus is ready to leave for villages near Kehl, and the driver agrees to let me off a few

kilometers from the Rhine Bridge. The bus is full of laughing, carefree children returning from school to their idyllic homes, surrounded by flower gardens and fruit trees. At the point closest to the bridge the driver lets me off and shows me which way to walk. I set out on this warm, caressing summer day along the deserted country road lined with apple, pear and plum trees. A lot of the delicious, juicy fruit, not seen in our stores for a long time, has fallen to the ground. I am having a feast, stuffing myself until the grumbling in the pit of my stomach reminds me I better stop.

On the horizon I see the steeple of Strassburg's venerable Cathedral, the "Muenster." Is this a futile pursuit or will I soon stand in its shadow and hear its deep bells toll? How will I fare at the border? What do the French care that I was disenfranchised in Nazi Germany! In their eyes I am just another enemy alien, a "boche" (slanderous term for German). The only advantage I have is that I speak their language passably well, thanks to my sweetheart Simone.

It suddenly dawns on me that I will have to lie my way into France, that by telling the truth about searching for my family I would never be admitted. Having a certain fluency of French, could I not have lived in Paris with my father and been deported by the Nazis like so many were? I vaguely remember that he lived on rue Faubourg de St. Honore. I bet that along with the Frenchmen bound for home there must be foreigners, some of them Jews, who resided in France before the war and are now trying to return. I see no choice but to be crafty and tell the border agents a tall tale so that they will admit me to their country. My heart beat quickens at the thought of what may lie ahead. I hitch a ride with a farmer who has been milking his cows, carrying pails of milk on his wagon. How bountiful and serene the countryside looks, especially after the devastation I have witnessed in our Northern cities.

Near Kehl, on the German side of the Rhine Bridge, a French military bus flying a tricolor pennant is waiting to take French POWs and civilians to the repatriation center. They arrive by twos and threes, dropped off by French army jeeps; most of them are former POWs in tattered uniforms. Of those in civilian clothing many had probably been pressed into forced labor in Germany. With butterflies in my stomach I board the bus, having no idea what formalities to expect. I picture them like other border crossings I made in the past.

dealing with border patrol officials and customs agents. To my surprise the bus carries us several kilometers beyond the Rhine Bridge where, passing a military guard station, it proceeds to a large gated compound. The arch under which we enter is festooned with French flags and banners proclaiming in French: "Welcome to France" and "Liberty, Equality, Brotherhood." The bus deposits us at a lot flanked by barracks and tents. A corporal smartly salutes and welcomes us; his spotless uniform contrasts with the bedraggled appearance in which most of us are arriving.

No doubt for good reason, our first stop is at the delousing station. There we choke on clouds of DDT; attendants wearing protective masks spray more of the white powder into our hair, on every inch of our bodies and all of our belongings. We must wait for the fumigation to take effect, then we are being marched off to a row of showers in the adjoining tent. Afterwards we all scramble to find a cot in a large dormitory. Soon a loud bell summons us to the mess hall for dinner. The meal is by far the best and most abundant I have eaten in years; beer and wine flow freely. I keep to myself and, when asked, confine my answers to "yes" or "no" for fear of being found an impostor. Were I feeling less anxious, I might enjoy the fine hospitality as much as the Frenchmen all around me, celebrating with their comrades the safe return to their country. So far so good, no compromising questions yet, no doubt because for that it is too late in the day.

While I eat my dinner alone a tall young man about my age, facing me at the end of the long table, attracts my attention. In his strong foreign accent he is chatting amiably with a French soldier. Since we are the only foreigners at the table I feel a sense of kinship with him. After dinner I walk over and introduce myself to him in French.

To my amazement he asks me point blank "Aren't you Jewish?"

Conditioned from Hitler's Germany where being Jewish spelled disaster, his blunt question takes me aback. But in a flash I realize that here the situation is reversed: being Jewish is no crime, being German may well be one.

So for the first time in my life I answer "Yes, I am. From Germany. Before the war I lived in Paris with my father until the Germans caught up with me again. I guess you are Jewish too?"

He nods. "Yes. I am David Schlesinger from Lodz, Poland. My parents emigrated to France before the war. In 1943 the SS rounded us up and deported us to Poland. My parents died in Auschwitz; I was lucky to survive. Now I am returning to Paris."

The ice broken and a bond established between us, David, a veteran of already two days in this repatriation camp, explains to me what formalities to expect.

"It takes the average Frenchman a day to be processed. He is interviewed, then there are medical and dental examinations, social service and transportation assistance, and off he goes. But special situations, such as ours, take longer; some chaps have been here a number of days. I have applied to be sponsored by a Jewish rescue organization and was told that with luck my application may be approved tomorrow. I bet HIAS (Hebrew Immigration Aid Society) would sponsor you too, my friend. First thing in the morning, before you queue up for your interview, see Dr. Weiszmann in the dentistry department. He represents that organization, and I bet he will help you as he has helped me."

I take heart at David's words. What a lucky coincidence that I struck up a conversation with this nice fellow! I will follow his advice and look for Dr. Weiszmann bright and early.

We stroll about the camp. David, his concentration camp tattoo visible on his arm, recounts to me, his voice trembling with emotion, how his parents were gassed at Auschwitz while he survived the horrors of the camp. He has a great need to share with me the story of his plight. In my mind I grope for a believable version of my deportation experiences, but David is so engrossed in his own tragic account that my turn to tell him my story never comes. Deep in conversation, we walk along the wall surrounding the compound.

Strange! The front gate to this camp is heavily guarded by military police, but at the rear there is no surveillance at all. To my amazement I see several fellows leaving the camp by scaling the wall at the lowest point, I imagine for a night on the town rather than being cooped up here. I am determined to follow their example as soon as possible, maybe already tomorrow, to search for my loved ones.

I toss and turn on my army cot, torn between hope and fear of what the future may hold for me. After daybreak at the sound of a loud bell everybody heads for the showers and breakfast. An officer

explains the entry procedures and hands us questionnaires to fill out. Following David's advice I go straight to the dentistry department to talk to Dr. Weiszmann. His nurse tells me that he is not expected until noon since in the morning he attends to his practice in town. I use the free time to complete the questionnaires I was given. Then I report to the medical office. Here they take my temperature, pulse and blood pressure, give me a chest X-ray and a superficial medical examination. At the next tent a team of orderlies visually screens everyone's lower torso, front and rear, for signs of VD. Like the medical examinations, the ones given at the dentistry department are very cursory, though some men are treated on the spot for dental emergencies.

Dr. Weiszmann, a polite, intelligent gentleman in his late forties, receives me in his private office with a warm smile and a firm handshake. Being Alsatian he readily recognizes my accent, and to my relief addresses me in German. He writes down the particulars of my story as I had meant to tell it to David yesterday, and promises to apply on my behalf for sponsorship to HIAS headquarters in Paris. An answer takes approximately 48 hours; therefore, I am to check back with him the day after tomorrow. If accepted I will be lodged at the HIAS repatriation shelter in Paris until I am able to make other arrangements.

My interview with the immigration agent has gone well; tomorrow morning's appointment with a military security officer may be more difficult. After that I am to report to an officer representing the Foreign Legion. I wonder why.

On my return to the dormitory, with all formalities for today behind me, I learn that David received his clearance and has already left for Paris. Will I be as lucky?

To distract myself I watch a Maurice Chevalier movie and drink a beer in the mess hall. After a while the smoke of those atrociously strong Gauloise cigarettes drives me away. I am both tense about the upcoming interviews and excited by the thought of being just a stone's throw from my family. In the darkness I keep walking up and down by the rear wall where yesterday I saw several young chaps making their getaways. Tomorrow I will take a crack at it myself, for it doesn't look hard to do. My determination to reach the goal which

brought me here outweighs my fear and my inborn German sense of obedience.

Another restless night, then two military security officers question me about the circumstances which led to my deportation. When I tell them that I expect to be sponsored by HIAS tomorrow they don't probe deeply. Under their protection I must be beyond reproach and won't become a burden to the French state. They ask me to return after I have been accepted by HIAS.

I cannot imagine what interest the Foreign Legion may have in me. The name evokes a sense of mystique and intrigue, conjuring up images of heroic battles in the North African desert, the stuff that movies are made of. The Legion officer indeed looks very dashing in his light beige uniform.

"The Legion offers young men like you a career of adventure and glory. Our legionnaires are the world's most respected and best paid soldiers," he rhapsodizes.

I assure him of my greatest admiration for the Legion but politely decline his offer to recruit me. After all, having been spared soldiering throughout the war, I do not in the least feel tempted to enlist now in the Foreign Legion!

My interviews are behind me, and a reply from Paris is not expected before tomorrow. If I am to chance my escapade over the wall at all it is now or never! For the past two days I have watched a number of trespassers climb the wall at its lowest point, amazed that the MPs are tolerating such an obvious breech of security. Now it is my turn! I take a giant step from an old tree stump, pull myself up to the top of the wall and slide down on the other side into the quiet suburban street. Easy! I walk quickly toward the city, using the steeple of the Cathedral as my point of orientation. Two schoolboys with satchels on their backs confirm that I am indeed headed toward the Orangerie Park, so well remembered from walks I had taken there with my grandfather. I am just a few blocks away from Opa's apartment at 11, rue Beethoven.

With a sense of foreboding I notice that our family name has disappeared from the tenants' directory. I ring the doorbell of the landlady, Madame Steimle; she was always a good friend of our family. A young maid answers the doorbell and calls her mistress. Recognizing me Madame Steimle stammers an embarrassed greeting

in French; disbelief and shock are written on her good-natured, motherly face; she asks me to sit down in the living room.

"Marie," I hear her tell the maid, "Run along to your sister's now. Just make sure that you are back in time to make the supper!"

It is obvious that she wants no witness to our conversation, for only after Marie has finished what she was doing, picked up her handbag and walked down the staircase, does Madame Steimle return to me, now daring to speak to me in a low voice in her Alsatian-tinged German.

"Now that we are French again," she whispers, "we cannot be careful enough with whom we associate; being branded a German-sympathizer is a serious charge."

"There is someone else's name on the directory."

"My dear Herr Mewes," she says softly, her face expressing sorrow and compassion, "Your folks were, like all Germans, put into internment camps. Your grandfather, old Dr. Mewes, just could not take the hardships; he died in Vichy about six months ago, I believe of typhoid fever. Your grandmother and your mother are still in the camp, waiting to be sent back to Germany."

I am heartsick at this devastating news. Poor Opa, his confidence in the goodness of the conquerors misplaced, had deserved better! And Mutti and Oma still in captivity, no doubt living in misery!

Madame Steimle, in turn, is shocked at the news that Yvonne, whom she remembers well from her two visits with her parents, died at the hands of the Gestapo. Though under very different circumstances, both father and daughter, so close to each other in life, met a similar fate, perishing just months apart in captivity!

"A few weeks after the French troops marched into Strassburg, all Germans who had moved here during the Hitler regime," explains Madame Steimle, "were ordered to assemble at a high school, bringing food for one day. From there they were shipped to the Strutthof, a concentration camp from Nazi times. It was December, and your mother, unprepared for a long stay, wrote me how badly she and her parents needed warm clothing, coats, sweaters and blankets. Suzanne Straehle, a friend of theirs and a patient of your grandfather's, helped me pack two suitcases for them and took them personally to the Strutthof camp. She still corresponds with your mother and grandmother; we both help them out from time to time

with whatever food we can spare to supplement their lean diet. Shortly after Christmas they were transferred to the Limagne internment camp outside Vichy. This is where your grandfather died and your mother and grandmother are now living. The government confiscated their furniture and belongings and ordered me to rent the apartment to a French civil servant. There are still some cartons with clothing in the basement. Why don't you look them over and see whether there is anything you might be able to use?"

Rummaging through their belongings in the basement evokes painful memories. From Opa's clothing I only choose a pair of boots, a bit tight for me, but perhaps they will stretch with use. At least they don't have holes in the soles like the ones I am wearing.

"Your mother writes to me occasionally," Madame Steimle continues. "Here is her last letter; copy the address so that you can write to her, but the camp accepts only brief messages in French. The inmates are allowed to write only ten lines a month on a special form. With some clothing which she had requested I enclosed a jar of jam and some chocolate. By the way, had you met their friend Suzanne Straehle when you visited your family? She really is an angel the way she helps and encourages them. An acquaintance of hers works at the camp in Vichy; he knows how to get around some of the restrictions that apply to mail and food packages. You have to understand, we Alsatians must prove that we are good Frenchmen; everything German is frowned upon. Corresponding with people at internment camps might arouse suspicion. That's why Madame Straehle's way of going through someone who carries mail in and out and sees to it that packages reach them intact is invaluable. Let me phone her and see whether she is home; I am sure she would love to talk to you."

"Well, too bad, there is no answer. Why don't you write down her name and address!"

Madame Steimle shows me a short letter which my mother sent her on a printed form. She says how grateful she and Oma were to receive her package with bread and marmalade, both so precious these days.

How fortunate that these two ladies are such loyal friends! They have, as the saying goes, "their hearts in the right place." As I leave for the camp, Madame Steimle bids me farewell with a motherly hug and promises to continue helping my folks as best she can.

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On my return to the camp I find scaling the wall from the street side, without a tree stump to step on, much harder than when I left. I have to summon all my strength to pull myself up the sheer wall, finally succeeding after a supreme effort and much huffing and puffing; I just could not afford to fail. At 18 o'clock I join the others for dinner in the mess hall. They are showing another movie, but after the tragic news I learned this afternoon I am in no mood to watch it. After I get to Paris I must do whatever I can to help Mutti and Oma in their great need.

"HIAS has agreed to sponsor you," Dr. Weiszmann beams at me as I call on him. "Show this document to the security officer as evidence of support; in Paris it will admit you to the HIAS shelter at rue des Rosiers. There you will be lodged and fed until you are able to stand on your own feet. Good luck, young man! I hope you will soon be able to join your father in America!"

I am thrilled to have passed this last hurdle and gratefully shake Dr. Weiszmann's hand. Full of confidence I head for the security office. With this sponsorship my application is promptly approved and processed. The key document issued to me, in the name of the Ministry of Defense, is the all important repatriation card. It entitles the bearer to free passage on any means of transportation throughout France, food rationing coupons, the tidy sum of 1,000 francs spending money, a pair of shoes, a shirt and a carton of those strong French cigarettes. I take them gladly; probably I will be able to trade them for something edible. This document identifies me as a D.R., an abbreviation for Racial Deportee. Deep within I cannot help feeling a bit guilty that all my conniving gives me this undeserved hero's welcome, but how else could I have entered France, so essential for helping my family and for starting a new life.

THE CITY OF LIGHTS

By afternoon I find myself on a military train to Paris, surrounded by French soldiers on furlough from their occupation duty in Germany. They are in festive spirits, happy to return home. My thoughts are worlds apart from theirs, but I too am happy and excited to be on my way to Paris.

On arrival I am getting lost first in the labyrinth of the Metro subway and then in the poorly-lit streets of the old Jewish quarter before I finally find the HIAS shelter. Located in a grey, time-worn building, it stands in contrast to the neat, modern camp I just left this afternoon in Strassburg! Though it is not like the Paris I had imagined, I am grateful to have a roof over my head and a cot to sleep on in this hot, crowded, noisy dormitory.

At the breakfast table I find myself surrounded by Eastern European concentration camp survivors, intense, brash and boisterous, marked by the hell they had to endure. In this tower of Babel, Yiddish, Russian and Polish compete with Romanian, Hungarian and other tongues. People keep company with those who speak their language, hail from their home town or have survived the same concentration camp. Hardly a word of French is heard. I am surprised to be able to understand much of the Yiddish spoken around me; it resembles the Southern German dialect I sometimes heard my mother speak. I wouldn't dare speak in my native High German, until recently, no doubt, the language of their hated oppressors.

Suddenly I spot David, my pal from the repatriation camp; he waves to me from across the hall. Among all those strangers I am happy to see his jovial, familiar face. He greets me like an old friend and, as once before, helps me orient myself in this new environment. He introduces me to two young Polish girls sharing his table, Sara and her sister Rachel. There is such sadness in Rachel's beautiful brown eyes, yet occasionally she breaks into an endearing smile. We manage carrying on a simple Yiddish-German conversation, each speaking his or her mother tongue. Rachel tells me about the hardships she endured and the loss of her parents. Later she points to an older man in her group, stocky and strong but despondent and withdrawn.

"He was forced to work at the crematorium in Auschwitz," she whispers. "There he even saw the bodies of his wife and two children being cremated. How can he ever forget!"

The Center's information and social service desks are closed for the weekend. Of course, I am very grateful that HIAS enabled me to get to Paris, but hope that I will not need to stay in this grim shelter for long. First I must let my mother know how I got to Paris under false pretenses, how heartbroken I am that Opa died and that she as well as Oma are in captivity. I would rush to her side were it not for the fear that, if I revealed my German identity, I might risk being interned as well. To avoid this I must continue to play the role of a Jewish deportee. This way I will be able to live here freely and do all I can to help her and Oma.

The mess hall cleared, I settle down in a corner to write a letter to Mutti and Oma and another one to Suzanne Straehle. I thank her for all she is doing for my family and ask her to please forward the attached confidential letter to my mother through her acquaintance at the Vichy camp.

My next goal is trying to locate my father in the U.S. Monday I will check whether the American Consulate may be able to help me accomplish this. Once the contact with him is established, perhaps he might know of a way to have my relatives freed from their imprisonment. I long for news from him and trust that after all these years he still wants me to join him in America, the land of freedom and opportunity.

Anxious for a first-hand look at the Paris of my dreams I tag along with a group of young people from our shelter to see the Eiffel Tower. Our leader is Avram, a furrier from Kiev, who after a few weeks in Paris knows his way around town. We follow him to the St. Paul Metro station to catch the train to the Etoile Square. Stepping into the daylight, there is the imposing sight of the Arc de Triomphe and the Champs Elysees Boulevard. For the first time I really appreciate being in the beautiful Paris I heard so much about. We take Avenue Kleber to the Trocadero Square. What a magnificent view from the terrace of the Palais du Chaillot, flanked by two fine museums, to Trocadero Gardens and the bridge across the Seine to the Eiffel Tower! To the left, the cupola of the Dome des Invalides sparkles in the sun.

I am thrilled with all this beauty and decide to devote the rest of the weekend to getting to know as much of Paris as possible, walking as far as my feet will carry me. Our group returns for lunch to the shelter; afterwards, loner that I am, I venture out on my own. Orienting myself by the city maps displayed outside every Metro station, I explore the medieval Place des Vosges, Paris' oldest square, a stone's throw from our shelter. It is only a skip and a jump across the Seine to Isle St Louis, then on to the Isle de la Cite. Here I admire Notre Dame Cathedral, the palaces and bridges by the Conciergerie Palace, remembered from the days of the French revolution.

At dinner I rave to Sara and Rachel about the wonderful sights I have seen and coax them to walk with me after dinner through the lively Latin Quarter with its sidewalk cafes, filled with revelers. I do not let our shabby attire discourage me from inviting the girls to a glass of wine at a cafe on Boulevard St. Germain. I love to see their eyes sparkle! "To life, to a new beginning!"

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Today is Monday, and the shelter's business office is open; I declare my arrival at the reception desk and find out what formalities to attend to. First I must register at the neighborhood police station. The indifferent reception with which the agents deal with both Frenchmen and foreigners alike seems to me at odds with the noble national motto "Freedom, Equality, Brotherhood" displayed everywhere. At city hall I need to apply for my identity card as well as my residence permit at the alien control office. This must be renewed every 60 days since I am a former enemy alien. The queues everywhere move at a snail's pace, and officials seem overworked and disinterested.

Madame Aaron, an experienced social worker at the shelter, advises me how to search for my father's whereabouts in the United States. I would have considered the U.S. Consulate or Embassy the logical starting point, but she suggests that I begin my search at HIAS' headquarters. Therefore, I set out today first thing this morning to their office on Boulevard Haussmann. The waiting room is crowded; I sign in with the receptionist and take a seat, filling out a

questionnaire which she has handed me, and await my turn to be interviewed.

Suddenly a short brunette lady in her early thirties, with a toddler by her side, walks up to me. Her face reflects intense curiosity as she asks me in halting French:

"Excuse me, isn't your name Harry? Aren't you the son of Imre Szanto from Cegled?"

I am absolutely flabbergasted that anybody in this vast, strange metropolis would recognize me, especially someone I do not remember ever having met before. When I confirm that I am indeed the person she speaks of, her face takes on an ecstatic expression, and she hugs and kisses me, in characteristically Hungarian fashion.

"Don't you remember me?" she exclaims. "I am Inci, your father's second cousin from Cegled! I remember you from before the war when you visited your grandmother. You were in Cegled with that nice Russian gentleman; I can't remember his name. Your grandmother gave a party in your honor. That's where I remember you from!"

My mind focuses on the time when Petsch had taken me to Hungary and Yugoslavia. There had been so many new impressions, so many strangers I met.

"Yes, of course. Didn't you have your mother and brother with you? How dumb of me not to have recognized you right away! Please excuse me. During those few days in Cegled I met so many relatives and friends of the family. How could I have expected to find you here in Paris, but I am delighted that you recognized me! Yes, now I remember you and your folks clearly!"

"Well, tragically my mother, brother Miclos and most of the family, may they rest in peace, all perished in Auschwitz. Among them were also your grandmother and Aunt Maria."

"How awful! I had feared for them when after the end of the war all those atrocities came to light."

"Yes, your grandmother had just had abdominal surgery; they took her right after the operation by ambulance from the hospital to the train; forced to stand up with all those people, she bled to death on the way to Auschwitz. Your cousin Agi, hidden by a Catholic friend, is the only one of the Szanto family who survived the deportations from Hungary."

"It is a blessing that at least Agi was saved!"

"What brings you to this office, Harry?" she wonders.

"I just arrived in Paris a few days ago, and at the HIAS shelter they told me that they might be able to help me locate my father in America."

"For that you won't need their help any more. I have his address at home. Over the past year we have been in touch with each other. You see, having so little family left draws us all closer together! By the way, this is my son Pistika, Etienne in French. He is a good kid but spoiled, being our only one so far. Wait for me, Harry! After I finish sending some money to an old uncle who survived in Budapest, you must come with us and meet my husband. Our apartment is small, but we will find a way to put you up. Probably you will be better off with us than at the shelter with all those strangers!"

Everyone in the waiting room has watched this emotional scene. Now they are on their feet, gathering around us, asking questions, laughing, congratulating us. What a fantastic coincidence! Had I seen this in a movie I would have dismissed it as a cheap, unbelievable gimmick - yet here it is happening to me right before my eyes!

Inci tells me that she lives with her husband Maurice Waldman and little Pistika in Montreuil, not far from Paris by Metro. She is overjoyed having found in me a relative, though a distant one, and insists that I stay with her and her family until I will be able to get settled on my own. By nature I don't like to make decisions on the spur of the moment, but this time I would gratefully accept her hospitality, if Maurice agrees, just to be able to get away from the depressing atmosphere of the shelter. So, her business done, we walk together to the Metro station, each holding one of Pistika's hands, as he prances along like a little colt. How nice to suddenly have family!

Montreuil turns out to be a very modest suburb: I am surprised at the number of Moroccans and Gypsies on the streets. Inci, Maurice and their little boy live on the fourth floor of a walk-up tenement on rue de l'Eglise. After climbing the steep staircase Inci bursts into the apartment and excitedly explains to her husband Maurice, half in Hungarian, half in French, how our surprise meeting came about. Likable, handsome and more composed than his wife, he welcomes me to his home. He and Inci are both from Cegled, the provincial town from which my father's family hails. Maurice manufactures

ladies handbags in partnership with a fellow Hungarian. In the small, cramped apartment every inch not used for family living is piled high with patent leather handbags, waiting to be sold or delivered.

I am surprised at how modest their accommodations and primitive the facilities are. All of the building's tenants depend on two outhouses in the courtyard. Since Inci's tiny flat is on the top floor it means climbing four flights of stairs. There are only two toilet stalls, flushing loud and vigorously; in the absence of seats one simply stands on two foot-rests over a large enameled hole. Two handle-bars on the wall serve to steady oneself in this uncomfortable, perilous position.

Obviously Inci's impulsive, generous nature made her invite me to stay with her, but there is absolutely no room for a guest in her flat.

"Don't worry, Harrikam," Inci reassures me, adding to my name a Hungarian form of endearment. "You'll stay here by day and have your meals with us; then at night you can sleep downstairs at Isaac's."

Isaac is Maurice's older brother; he lives with his family on the street level of the same apartment building. A watchmaker by trade, he sells and repairs clocks and watches from his shop next to the living quarters. There is no point arguing with her, nor would I want to dissuade her since anything would be an improvement over the shelter which I am anxious to leave. I hope that my stay with Inci will not be long, for I intend looking for employment right away and may then be able to afford a room of my own.

Inci introduces me to Isaac and his wife; they don't mind putting me up temporarily. Then I return by Metro to rue des Rosiers, pick up my knapsack and check out of the shelter. Madame Aaron can hardly believe that her referral led me to Inci, and that she "adopted" me instantly. She promises to watch out for any mail I might receive; I am anxiously awaiting a reply to the letter I sent Mutti through Madame Straehle a few days ago.

Returning for supper, Maurice proudly hands me the cablegram which he sent this afternoon to my father. Translated into English it reads "Harry safely with us. Trudi and mother interned. Letter follows. Love, Maurice and Inci."

Will Father be surprised! In a day or two there should be a reply.

Over dinner Maurice and I discuss how best to help my family in the Vichy camp. Food is rationed and in short supply in France,

making a great deal of bartering necesssary. Fortunately Maurice is adept at the game, and for starters proposes exchanging my Gauloise cigarettes for bread, cheese, canned sardines and whatever else he can find. I am grateful for his help and eager to send a relief package to the camp.

Brother Isaac and his wife Ruth have two daughters, Rosalie, eleven, and Olga, thirteen years old. They also live in cramped quarters but are agreeable to having me bed down on an old sofa in the store room behind the clock shop. Settling in for the night, the din from the dozens of clocks in the shop and show-window is unbelievable. There are large grandfather clocks, cuckoo clocks, alarm clocks and clocks of every size and type imaginable, ticking and marking the hours. I lie awake for a while, first fascinated then lulled to sleep by the variety of sounds.

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How different American English sounds from the King's English which I was taught at school in Hamburg! I did quite well on the written English test they gave me this morning at the U.S. Army civilian personnel office. Expressing myself is not my main problem, but I have a hard time understanding Americans, including the personnel officer who interviewed me for a clerical job. The decision whether I qualify rests with the supply officer in whose department the opening is to be filled. I am a bit nervous as the French civilian chauffeur drives me by jeep, shabbily dressed and speaking poor English, to the impressive Headquarters Command building on rue Fresnel. But First Lieutenant Thomas Wilson, in his sparkling uniform, receives me warmly, almost like an equal, as I hand him my application.

At the end of the short interview he puts me at ease saying: "Don't worry. Your English is fine. After a few months with us you will be able to teach our boys a thing or two."

He is willing to give me a chance for the job if I can get security clearance. Americans seem far less concerned about my "enemy alien" status than the French are, especially when I tell them that I expect to join my father in the U.S.A. as soon as I succeed in getting my visa. So Lt. Wilson sends my application with his endorsement

through the proper channels. I should have an answer within a few days.

On my return to Montreuil Inci radiantly waves at me the cablegram which Maurice just received from Father.

It reads: "Infinitely grateful for good news about Harry. Please airmail details how to help mother. Sending letter and aid package. Love, Imre."

I am overjoyed that the connection to Father, interrupted since he fled Spain in 1941, is now re-established thanks to the chance encounter with Inci. I rush a letter off to him expressing my sorrow for the cruel loss of his mother and sister in Auschwitz, and telling him how my family and I have fared during the intervening years. I ask him about his life in America and how he feels about my joining him there, including with my letter Mutti's address at the Limagne Internment Camp at Vichy-Bellerive. Perhaps he might have an idea how to bring about her release, either through a lawyer or an aid organization.

Today Maurice was able to barter the last of my Gauloise cigarettes for food that I can send to my loved ones. On his rickety portable typewriter I write them a note describing how I got to France under false pretenses and of my fear that, if my true identity were known, I might be interned as they are. I promise them that, while awaiting my visa for America, I will do my utmost to help alleviate their suffering. Written on onion skin paper, I insert it, tightly folded, through a fine cut into the loaf of bread to be sent. Tomorrow I intend mailing the parcel and hope that both the food and my note will reach them safely and lift their spirits.

My hosts are dressed in their best clothing and attend services at the small synagogue in observance of Yom Kippur, the day of atonement. Isaac's family is far more observant than his brother's. Contrary to Inci, Ruth has supposedly received a fairly strict religious upbringing and passes on the traditions to her daughters. This high holiday calls for going without food and drink all day. Inci's family follows these rules more loosely. However, the terrible loss of life that Jewry has suffered in Europe draws the survivors closer together and strengthens religious traditions. Maurice and Inci treat me like a member of the family except for the ceremonial aspects of their religion. However, I join them in honoring the memory of the many

relatives who fell victim to Nazi barbarism, including my grandmother and Aunt Maria.

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The American Embassy is located at the majestic Place de la Concorde, facing the Egyptian obelisk brought here from the Temple of Luxor. I arrive there with an air of anticipation to inquire how to apply for my immigration visa. They send me to the consular section across the street. Since my English is weaker than my French, I am relieved that the lady interviewing me is French. I must complete the forms she gives me and return them together with Father's affidavit of support. The lady says that my having applied at the American Consulate in Barcelona five years ago should shorten the waiting period significantly.

It is Saturday afternoon, and I am pleased and relieved to have gotten well through the first week on my new job with the US Forces Headquarters Supply Section. The work is simple: I record the name, rank, serial number and location of each American soldier from one of several sources onto a central card file. With tens of thousands of GIs stationed in France the job is never done. The data are not always clear, therefore, I often must ask questions. I still have trouble understanding Americans and find the Southerners the hardest to make out. And wouldn't you know it, most of the servicemen in our section are from Texas! They are good natured and just laugh when I get flustered. They tease me, but I get even with them, imitating the way they butcher the French language.

It is a blessing to have Lisette, a freckle-faced blond with pigtails, sitting by my side, always so cheerful and pleasant. Already three months on the job, she can usually straighten things out that cause me trouble. A native Parisian, she also acts as our official city guide. Since she knows well both the U.S. personnel and my civilian fellow workers, she introduces me to everybody in the office.

My favorite American at the office is Sergeant Joe Walker. He is from New Jersey, speaks very distinctly so that I can understand him well. Prior to being drafted into the Army he had been studying journalism. We discover early on that we both have a curiosity about places, people and their culture; therefore, we find a lot to talk about.

By contrast most of his comrades show little interest in their surroundings: they are just marking time for their stint of duty to end so that they may return home and get on with their lives.

We are approximately twenty civilian employees working for the Americans in this building on Avenue Kleber, just a block west of the Arc de Triomphe. The US Army provides us with lunch at a very nominal cost, certainly a boon in these difficult times! At noon we all troop, in groups of threes or fours, down the Champs Elysees to the Prisunic Department Store. Here the modern, cheerful lunch counter is reserved to feed us civilian employees. True enough, SPAM, scrambled dehydrated eggs and K-rations are the mainstay of our diet, but we consider ourselves fortunate to get a filling meal for just 12 francs, and we need not even touch our food rationing coupons. Besides, we have a good time chatting over lunch and walking along Paris' most beautiful and elegant avenue.

My shabby attire makes me feel so out of place in these nice surroundings. I am very grateful for Inci's and brother Isaac's hospitality, but get impatient with the gypsy life I lead between the fourth floor flat and the nights on the sofa behind the clock shop. With my first pay check I must find a room of my own!

I have become an admirer and enthusiastic user of the Paris Metro; it whisks one quickly and efficiently from one end of the city to the other. During the morning rush hour I join the army of commuters who squeeze through the turnstiles and spill onto the platform to catch the train for the Nation Station. There I follow the sign marked "Correspondance" (transfer), and let myself be swept along by the crowd heading for the Pont de Neuilly Line. Stairs and escalators leading up and down through a maze of advertising-plastered corridors can easily carry one off to the wrong Metro line. An automatic door stops those passengers determined to storm a train that is about to depart, holding them back for the next one. The wait is short, for during the rush hour one train follows another within minutes. A thunder and a gust of compressed air precedes its arrival. The crowd jostles to board the train, a strident whistle blow signals that the automatic doors of the cars are about to slam shut, and the train pulls out.

It is fun to watch the variety of passengers, blue or white-collar workers, formally-dressed businessmen, students laden with books,

prim secretaries, soldiers wearing the uniforms of many nations, travelers from the Gare de Lyon Railway Station, a constant coming and going. I know by heart the names of all the stops along the way: City Hall, Louvre, Royal Palace, Concorde, Champs Elysees, finally Etoile where I get off. Here several Metro lines converge in a labyrinth of passageways, ticket booths, shops and underground plazas, usually animated by street musicians and flower vendors. There is so much life everywhere!

It is Saturday afternoon, and traffic is light. There are the ever-present tourists, young couples and parents showing their little ones the grand Arc de Triomphe and the city's many other wonderful sights. I am taking the Metro to St. Paul's Station, for Madame Aaron has left word that she received mail for me from Madame Straehle. I pick it up on the way home to Montreuil. I hope it contains a letter from my family in Vichy!

Here at last is Mutti's long, uncensored letter, but its contents plunges me into despair. She and Oma are very excited that I am in France, and I see how many illusions they make themselves that I will somehow be able to help them gain their freedom or at least pay them a visit. The further I read, the more discouraged I feel about their situation and the suffering they must endure. In spring they could do nothing but helplessly look on while Opa wasted away and finally died of starvation and neglect. Mutti writes that she, Oma and the other detainees sleep on straw spread over the cold cement floor of their barrack. Long ago they had petitioned the mayor of Strassburg to let them return to their native city, but their pleas have remained unanswered. For months it had been rumored that the camp was about to be closed and the inmates returned to Germany, but who knows when this will be the case.

A few days ago Mutti came down with hepatitis. She is running a fever and her skin has turned yellow, but there is no treatment for it at the camp. Oma suffers from constant diarrhea like Opa did before he died. Mutti's letter closes with a plea for help. Inci is in tears learning what hardship they are enduring; Maurice promises to help me provide whatever relief possible.

Their plight upsets me profoundly. How can I be at peace with myself knowing that they are in such dire need and distress! If only I could visit and console them. But what purpose would that serve? I

would only risk exposing myself to the same fate as theirs, thus ending my plans for a better future and the chance of helping them!

My heartache is, at least momentarily, tempered by today's letter from Father. How remarkable that on the same day, after years of separation from my parents, I receive a letter from each of them, but from such divergent places and under such different circumstances!

Five years have gone by since Father vanished into the night in Barcelona, fearing arrest by the Gestapo. After the long uncertainty of the war years he is happy and relieved that I survived unscathed those terrible years that robbed him of his mother, sister, and most of his family and friends in Hungary. Grateful that I am safely in Paris with his second cousin Inci, he is eager to do whatever he can to help me as well as my mother and grandmother. He regards Mutti's and Oma's long internment as most unjust, and wonders how to help them gain their freedom.

I have written Father in French, and he is answering me in the same language. Being a linguist he is happy that in this respect I am following him in his footsteps. He recommends that I take advantage of my stay in France to perfect myself in this beautiful and important language. I agree, all the more since without a fair knowledge of French I would never have been able to get into this country. Working for the Americans makes me aware of my shortcomings in English. Therefore, I will continue writing him in French, but he had better answer me in English, to help me become more fluent in the language of the country which will some day be my homeland.

*****

Lieutenant Vogle, civilian labor officer of our Post Supply Section, wants to see me. Does my performance leave so much to be desired that I am to be laid off, I ask myself as I nervously report to him.

"Harry," he announces, "starting next Friday your duties will include paying our civilian workers in the field. It's easy and it should be fun. Claude will drive you every week on pay day first to the payroll department, then to the different army posts around town. Report to Monsieur Blanchard Friday morning at 10 o'clock; he will explain to you your new duties."

I don't quite know what to expect, but it sounds like a challenging and interesting assignment.

The paymaster, an old-fashioned bureaucrat, scrutinizes me sternly. He has me sit down facing his desk covered with payroll trays, one for each work station. The tray for our Post Supply Section contains approximately sixty large envelopes brimming with those over-sized French banknotes. Each envelope bears the name of an employee. Mr. Blanchard hands me a roster of all the personnel I am to pay. After he calls out the name of the person on the envelope, he takes out the banknotes and, with professional precision and speed, counts them out aloud.

"Bertoldi, Raymond: five hundred, one thousand, one thousand five hundred, six hundred, seven hundred, eight hundred, fifty, sixty, seventy, five francs sixty - One thousand eight hundred seventy five francs and sixty centimes."

Though I am still not 100% comfortable with the French currency, I do my best to follow his count as fast as I can, sometimes motioning him to slow down. I must acknowledge by my signature having received the correct wages of each worker on the roster. The contents of each envelope is now my responsibility. On to the next envelope, thousands of francs more, on and on until my head spins from the tension and all the counting!

Claude is expecting me at the front gate with our division jeep when I finally come out of the payroll department with the bulky payroll pouch. Everyone loves this jovial Parisian; he resembles Maurice Chevalier, is funny and full of the devil. When his roving eye spies a comely demoiselle, he carries on meowing like an amorous tomcat.

I can count on one hand the number of times when I have ridden in an automobile in my lifetime. Now I suddenly have one at my disposal and with my own chauffeur! I feel on top of the world, criss-crossing Paris in an open jeep! We stop at PX-commissaries, garages, mess halls, workshops, wherever the Army employs civilian workers. Awaiting their weekly payroll envelopes, all welcome us warmly. Claude introduces me all around, then chats and banters with his buddies. He has a joke and a chuckle for everyone. I settle down wherever I can and remove the envelopes from the pouch. All eyes are expectantly trained on me; I open each employee's envelope and

count out the contents aloud, and obtain the recipient's signature. Lt. Vogle was right, this payroll duty, though entailing responsibility, is indeed fun.

*****

Conditions in victorious France are no better than in defeated Germany. Life is expensive and food strictly rationed or sold on the black market at exorbitant prices. Some common necessities have all but disappeared from the stores. Maurice is a savvy businessman; on his advice I write Father what items are in demand and can be profitably traded or sold. This week's wish list includes toothbrushes, razor blades, combs, sewing needles and American cigarettes. Father's packages are a great help to me and my family in Vichy. Since I work for the American Army he can mail them to me at the APO without spending a fortune. Through personal contacts, either Maurice or my well-connected chauffeur Claude, and even I, manage to sell or exchange these treasures for bread, sardines, jam, chocolate and other food. By now I have accumulated a large enough horde to warrant mailing two parcels. To reduce the risk of loss through thievery, I send one package directly to the camp, the other through Madame Straehle in Strassburg. In one parcel I hide a letter inside a tube of toothpaste, in the other I slip a 100 franc note in a cake of soap; I hope that both will reach Mutti undetected. Some packages are pilfered by camp guards. When this happens my efforts have been in vain, but I cannot let this hazard deter me, for the items that get through may save their lives.

My appearance and with it my morale has greatly improved since Father sent me some much needed clothing: a pair of grey wool slacks, three shirts, a lovely blue sweater, socks, underwear, pajamas and a pair of shoes, used but in good condition. Lisette and my fellow workers immediately notice my improved appearance; they compliment and tease me about it. The woolen suit Father also sent me needs taking in, but this will have to wait until I can afford having it altered.

Great news: Despite the severe housing shortage I found, thanks to the recommendation of a well-meaning, motherly colleague, Madame Bonnet, a lovely room on the sixth floor of a fine elevator

building in a good neighborhood near Montmartre. It is only a stone's throw from the famous Sacre Coeur Basilica; I awake every morning to the tolling of its bells. My window overlooks the roof of the adjoining building on which Pathe-France Studios assembles and films miniature movie sets with fascinating landscapes and quaint villages.

I rent the room with kitchen privileges from Monsieur and Madame Laurens, an elderly couple, as their only tenant. When Monsieur Laurens first heard that I am German he told his wife that under no circumstances would he share his apartment with a "boche." Fortunately he relented after Madame Bonnet put in a good word for me, and when he heard that I am not only working for the U.S. Forces but awaiting my U.S. visa. Now the Laurens treat me almost like a member of the family. I am delighted with my room and proud of my new surroundings. I would not have been able to afford it without floating a small loan from Maurice, for in addition to the rent I had to advance a month and a half security deposit.

During the short time since I arrived in Paris my life has definitely taken a turn for the better. The uncanny encounter with Inci provided me immediately with accommodations and family support. Even more importantly, it put me in touch with Father who is eager to have me near him in America. It was also a lucky break that I landed an interesting job with the U.S. Army pending availability of my visa. However, the anguish over the internment of my loved ones never leaves me. To preserve my sanity and my health I must guard against letting this torment dominate my life.

After working five and a half days a week I treasure my weekends to explore all the splendor that Paris has to offer, its boulevards teeming with life, its majestic squares, the Etoile, Concorde, Vendome, and its grandiose palaces, museums and churches. Paris is meant to be enjoyed by walking. With the bookstalls along the Seine and the wonderful bridges crossing the river, the flower beds of the Luxembourg Gardens, the enormous Boulogne Park, there is never enough time to do it all justice!

Living near Montmartre is exciting! Many an evening I climb the winding footpath to the Sacre Coeur; it dominates the Paris sky line with its majestic white cupola. From this high point the whole city, the Eiffel Tower and the dome of Les Invalides, lie at one's feet. I

love watching the painters sketch the likenesses of guests at the crowded outdoor restaurants at Place de Tertre. From the Basilica a graceful flight of stairs slopes down to a maze of quaint, bustling streets. Strolling along Boulevards Rochechouart and Clichy to Place Pigalle, I pass a bevy of lively cabarets and music halls.

Since I moved to my own quarters I visit Inci, Maurice and little Pistika at least once a week, even more often when they have mail or a package for me. They always receive me warmly, sharing with me my joy about a bonanza from America or my pain when bad news from the camp gets me down. I just wish they would not feel so nervous about receiving Mutti's letters for me from a "Camp for Protective Custody." They are scared that people might suspect them of having ties to public enemies. The war is over but old fears die hard.

Father feels that Mutti is being unjustly detained. He writes to a number of influential people who, he hopes, might perhaps be able to help secure her freedom. He begs them to do whatever possible to bring about the release of "his fiancee" and her elderly mother.

After a long, worrisome silence, I finally receive an uncensored letter from Mutti, circuitously routed through Madame Straehle's acquaintance. Thank God, she has recovered from the hepatitis attack. Our packages helped physically and morally though pilferage continues to be a vexing problem. She and her fellow inmates are also bitter about the cooks and wardens, accusing them of living high off the hog at their expense, misappropriating food intended to feed the detainees. Since early morning the smell of roast meat and pommes frites wafts from the kitchen throughout the camp. It tantalizes the prisoners who are wasting away on pitiful rations: watery broth with pieces of onion in it for breakfast; cabbage, beet, cucumber or potato soup with a little bread for lunch and dinner. Only on Sundays a thin slice of meat, rumored to be horse meat, is served.

"Puedi," Mutti writes, "I am so ashamed to keep begging for food, but please send us bread and whatever else you can get hold of, and ask Suzanne and our Strassburg friends to do the same. It is for us a matter of survival."

As often before, there are again rumors that the camp is about to be closed and the inmates sent to Germany, perhaps as soon as by

Christmas. Mutti and Oma have not given up hope of being granted permission to return to Strassburg instead of Germany. I also would prefer this rather than their having to face the strenuous trip to that war-ravaged country. I fervently hope that the long ordeal of their imprisonment, which cost Opa his life, will soon be over.

Oma's enclosed letter to me, "her darling boy," brings tears to my eyes.

"Whether these are my last greetings for a while or for all times rests with God. Returning to what used to be our second home town without our beloved Opa will be hard, especially since we have lost for the third time all that we owned. Still, just the thought of being able to sleep again in a bed rather than on the floor and to prepare our own meals seems like a dream. Above all, I must determine the whereabouts of my children. My warm wishes for happiness and fulfillment in the New World for you, and later on perhaps for your dear mother as well! My strength and courage are waning, but I hold you close to my heart with enduring love. Your old loyal friend."

May both Mutti and Oma fare well, whether in Strassburg or in Hamburg! They don't know how cruel a blow awaits them, for I have so far never written to them that Yvonne died at the hands of the Gestapo. There is no news from Aunt Erna and her family; their town is now in the Russian zone of occupation. Reports from there are sketchy but troubling.

*****

When I submit my visa application and Dad's affidavit of support to the American Consulate they tell me that Father will still need to send me verification of his legal entry. In turn I require a health certificate and a stateless passport, which may take some doing. Once I have these documents, my leaving depends on how quickly my quota number is called up and how soon I can find transportation. I put my name on every possible waiting list: with Cook Travel, American Express and all steamship lines serving North America; however, all vessels and airlines are fully booked for months ahead.

Christmas is near, the store windows are festively decorated, but I am not in a holiday mood knowing how much my family is suffering. A note from Madame Straehle adds to my worry: her acquaintance

told her that the camp in Vichy has been shut down. Rather than being freed the inmates were shipped to another camp near Paris. She promises to write to me after she finds out where they are. How disappointing that they were not released to Germany as expected! I can't believe that for these innocent civilians the endless wait continues, that they must endure yet another Christmas in captivity, God knows where and in what misery.

My fellow workers are eager to cut the office party short so that they can celebrate Christmas with their families. During the holiday season I feel a sense of kinship with the GIs; they are homesick on this their first holiday season away from home.

Seeking solace in nature I return to the Royal Park and Orangerie at Versailles. As I had expected, the castle and museums are closed, but the vast grounds, now deserted, are magnificent in their wintry solitude. The graceful statues of Diana, Apollo, Venus, Neptune and Bacchus mysteriously emerge from the fog that blankets the trees, fountains and canals. I walk slowly along the park's wide, silent pathways, immersed in reading a pocket edition of Plato's *Gorgias*. With what clarity of thought he describes in his dialogue with Socrates the nature of right and wrong!

PITHIVIERS

Finally there is mail from Mutti, written in French on a form allowing for seven lines of information. It says that she and Oma have been for the last three weeks at a place called Pithiviers. On the map it appears to be not too far from Paris. I decide on the spur of the moment that I must go early tomorrow, New Year's Day, by train to Pithiviers. Perhaps luck will be on my side and they will let me see my loved ones, even if just for a short while. That would be a wonderful start of 1946!

Upon arrival I briskly walk from the old-fashioned railroad station toward town; the morning is grey and bitter cold. The townspeople whom I ask about the camp's location seem distrustful and hostile to strangers. At last a truckman, starting up the cold engine of his vehicle, offers me a lift. Past factory buildings and empty fields the camp comes into view at the left of the highway in this flat, barren countryside. The trucker lets me off with a nod, and I walk along the road to the entrance gate.

The camp is a huge, forbidding-looking complex with maybe twenty-odd ramshackle barracks, surrounded by high barbed wire fences. Guards with rifles over their shoulders man watchtowers at each of the camp's four corners. I ask the sentry, guarding the gate, for permission to see Madame Gertrude Marquardt and her old mother.

"No visitors allowed!" he mutters.

Desperate to accomplish my mission now that I am so close, I beg him to let me talk to his superior. He shrugs his shoulders and leads me listlessly to the nearby station house. It is heated and a radio is playing.

"I have come all the way from Paris to pay a New Year's visit to an elderly lady and her daughter in Barrack No. 16, close friends from Strasbourg. I am told that there are no visitors allowed, but thought you might perhaps be so kind and make an exception since it's New Year's Day," I plead with the officer. "I have a holiday package I want to give them in person."

"Sorry, young man," he replies politely but firmly. "You need a visitors permit from the prefect of the Loire Region. His office is in

the city hall of Orleans. If you wish to leave your parcel with me I will see to it that your friends get it."

Deeply disappointed, I have no choice but to turn my package over to him. Aside from a wool blanket that Madame Straehle mailed me, it contains a loaf of bread, a bottle of wine, chocolate, butter, soap, toothpaste, a hand brush, aspirin and saccharin, either saved up from my rations, traded or sent from America. In these days of shortages and hardship I hate having to entrust this man with such treasures. But what choice do I have?

Leaving by the main gate I notice a service road surrounding the camp. Perhaps from it I might find a spot that gives me a better look at the barracks and at life in this grim place. Despite the intense cold I see no smoke rising from the smoke-stacks; they must be unheated. At a window of one of the nearer barracks I vaguely distinguish faces. Could Mutti or Oma be among them? If they only knew that I am standing here on the road, straining to get a glimpse of them!

No one in his right mind would willingly venture outside in this icy cold; yet there are indeed inmates bundled-up, running from the barracks to open-air latrines, totally unprotected from the elements. I am appalled at these miserable living conditions. How can innocent civilians be treated so shabbily, kept imprisoned in former Gestapo camps more than a year after the war has ended!

A wretched-looking squad of German prisoners of war passes by, carrying material they just unloaded from a freight car on a nearby railway spur. I do not dare talk to them openly since there are armed guards, but I chance whispering under my breath to the last two soldiers in German:

"Do you ever get into the camp?"

"Yes," one answers, obviously surprised to hear me speak German, "every day."

"Greetings to Gertrude Marquardt, Barrack No.16, from Harry!" I mutter, doubtful they are able to catch my words.

One of them falls a few feet behind, mumbling "We'll be coming back."

The guard gives me a suspicious glance. I continue walking, feeling under scrutiny also from the nearby watchtower. Further on I slow down, wondering whether the POWs will return. After a while I

see them on a distant road marching off in a different direction; so I give up and walk back to town.

A few hours remain till the next train leaves for Paris around 18 o'clock. I warm myself in the waiting room of the railway station over a glass of mulled wine, a godsend on a frosty day like this. Wandering aimlessly about the sleepy town, I finally rest a while in the church behind a group of old ladies kneeling in front of a side altar. The warm glow of the votive candles helps sooth my mind, still in turmoil.

Restless and refusing to accept defeat, I walk back once more to the camp as daylight dims, in the hope of getting a better look at the barracks' occupants. I catch indeed furtive glimpses of people near the windows, but alas not the ones I long to see. How miserable, hungry and cold they must be, though now thin plumes of smoke are rising from some of the smoke stacks. Finally, heartsick and defeated, I trudge back to the railroad station to return to Paris.

Madame and Monsieur Laurens, my landlords, assuming that nostalgia and the holiday blues have gotten me down, invite me to share a glass of wine and dessert with them; I gratefully accept. If they only knew how I spent this New Year's Day and why I feel so burdened! But then it may be better that they don't, for knowing might chill their good feelings toward me.

*****

I eagerly read Father's letters for clues of what life may be like in America, and wonder how I might fit in once I get there. About a year ago he started a small export company under the name Overseas Traders. He writes that now that the war is over, American products are in demand all over the world, and business will prosper once the world economy recovers. His new venture sounds certainly more promising than the clerking, translating and teaching he used to do in his younger years; he will still be able to use his business and languages skills to good advantage. Will I be able to do likewise once I get there?

In recent letters Father often referred to "Anne." She must be a lady friend; I am curious if she is one among several or whether there is a lasting bond between them. Now in his mid-forties, he has

always lived a bachelor's life. I am twenty-two years old. Perhaps some day we may both be lucky in love!

*****

I am just leaving the office when Maurice phones that he has a telegram for me. "Please open it and read it to me." It is from Mutti in Pithiviers and says in French:

"Come immediately, mother in hospital gravely ill."

Her message worries me deeply. Will I still see my beloved grandmother alive?

Lisette wonders why I am so upset but, of course, I cannot tell her the reason. Now I can no longer worry about my own safety but must get a visitor's permit, regardless of the consequences.

"Do me a favor, Lisette; please tell Lt. Vogle that I won't be able to report for work tomorrow; I have an emergency."

Ever since I arrived in France I had feared, probably wrongly, that applying to visit my relatives at the camp would risk getting me interned as well. I kept worrying how to represent myself, what lies to tell. Yet here at the prefect's office in Orleans the clerk in charge just glances casually at my telegram. Then, without asking me a single question, he writes out a visitor's pass to see Gertrude Marquardt. Since her married name is different from mine, nobody would suspect her of being my mother; they might not care even if they knew. Relieved to have passed this hurdle I rush to the railway station, impatient to catch the train to Pithiviers. On arrival I run, as fast as my feet will carry me, to the grim camp with its fences and watchtowers.

The security officer at the gate inspects my visitor's pass and has me sit down on a bench by the station house. He sends a comrade to fetch my mother from Barrack No. 16. My heart pounds furiously, looking forward to seeing her again after two long years, but fearing for Oma's health. After a long wait the guard returns alone and says that the person is attending a funeral.

I am numb with pain. Mutti's telegram had left me wondering whether my grandmother could survive a serious illness in her weakened condition. I had so much wanted to find her still alive. I

am shattered that death has claimed my dear grandmother's life at this awful place, nine months after her husband met the same fate.

At a distance I see Mutti slowly walking toward me on the dirt road along the barbed wire, followed by an armed guard. Now she recognizes me. I rush toward her and she sinks into my arms with an anguished wail, tears streaming down her face.

"Puedi darling, you are too late! They just buried her in that lonely cemetery!"

"Oh, if only I could have seen her once more alive, our wonderful Oma! What did she die of? Did she suffer a lot?"

"No, it was all so quick and unexpected! Monday morning she suddenly slumped over and collapsed right next to me on the barrack's floor. I cradled her in my arms, comforting her as best I could. She wanted to speak to me but was unable. She just looked deeply into my eyes, frightened and confused. They took her by ambulance to the hospital in town. In the afternoon the nurse brought me there, but Oma was already dead. She looked at peace, her eyes closed and her hands folded over her chest. The doctor said a massive heart attack killed her. For a while I sat at her bedside and wept. I slipped her wedding ring from her cold hand and they took me back to the camp. Today was her funeral. Oh Puedi, first Opa and now Oma gone; I miss them so much!"

How frail and pitiful Mutti looks, she who always was a picture of health and so good looking! Now her complexion is sallow and she is emaciated from having lost so much weight.

The guard has gone off to smoke and chat with his comrades, leaving us to ourselves. We cling together tightly, comforting each other and talking about all that has happened since I last visited her in Strassburg. Mutti relives how she and Oma tried to persuade Opa to cross the Rhine Bridge into Germany just hours before the Allies reached the city.

"I had gotten the travel permits and our suit cases were packed, but Opa stubbornly refused to return to Germany. I just could not bring myself to leave them alone. So our fate was sealed."

What a painful shock to Mutti when I tell her of Yvonne's tragic end in Ravensbrueck! To spare my grandmother that cruel blow, I had omitted this news from the two letters which I spirited into the camp. It is a relief that Oma never knew the awful truth.

Mutti can think of nothing else but leaving the hell of this camp, to be once again able to come and go freely and to live with human dignity. I assure her that her internment cannot go on much longer, that soon she will be free in Hamburg, and that once in America, I will send for her as soon as possible.

The guard has been respectful and patient with us; perhaps he felt sorry for Mutti who has just buried her mother. Now, however, he reminds us that our time is up. We part with a long, tearful embrace. How painful it is leaving her, alone in her bereavement, facing the cold, starvation and an uncertain future! When and where shall we meet again?

Returned to Paris, the memory of my mother in this condition haunts me. After work I write black-edged bereavement letters to my father and the Alsatian friends. Putting into words all that I feel only intensifies my grief about the great loss.

My grandparents had ill-advisedly returned to Strassburg to recapture in their old age the happiness they had known there in their younger days. Rather than expect reprisal from the victors, they had unrealistically believed that, advanced in years, they would be allowed to live out their days in peace. Instead, the conquerors immediately interned all German civilians including women, children and the elderly, in the same former Nazi concentration camps which world opinion had condemned as infamous. Those who were not strong enough to endure the starvation and disease, among them my beloved grandparents, perished. Perhaps it might have been too much to expect fairness and humane treatment from the victors right after the horrendous Nazi crimes had come to light.

NEW HOPE

Here it is, at last, Mutti's long awaited letter announcing her departure for Germany. Written three days ago, she must have left France already. I read and re-read her farewell:

"The freight cars that will take us to Germany are lined up on the tracks outside the camp. In a day or two we are supposed to reach Muenster, Westphalia. From there they will send us wherever we want to go, in my case Hamburg. How I yearn to be free after these terrible sixteen months of captivity! With Oma and Opa buried here in France, our family scattered, and you, Puedi, beyond my reach in Paris, Hamburg will be a lonely place. Yet I trust that someone will give me shelter until I get on my feet again. You are always in my thoughts, my darling son. May your future be bright and happy, and may we be reunited some day soon! Mutti."

I am so relieved that, unlike her parents, she has survived the long ordeal. With her no longer in France there is little to keep me here, and I am eager to leave for America. The documents which Father has sent seem in order, and I have high hopes that my turn will soon come at the Consulate and for steamship passage.

*****

An exciting discovery: Simone, my former sweetheart and companion from the war years in Hamburg is in Paris! I had written to her father in St. Omer inquiring about her whereabouts. My hope for an answer had already faded when yesterday I received a note from her. She is most surprised to discover that I also live in Paris. She writes that since her return from Germany she has been staying here with her cousin, for her home town had shown great hostility toward young women who had fraternized with the enemy. She works as a saleslady in the handbag department of Galleries Lafayette: some day, she writes, we should meet and catch up on all that has happened in our lives since we last saw each other.

Impatiently I feel a great urge to see her right away. Without revealing any details I tell Claude that I must absolutely meet a young

lady after we finish tomorrow's payroll delivery. Being quite a ladies' man he loves conspiring in matters of the heart.

Our work done, Claude drops me off at the rear of the enormous department store. Full of anticipation I make my way through the endless aisles of fine merchandise, searching for Simone. At last I spot her serving two ladies, about to leave. How poised she moves about, and how refined she looks in her tasteful smock, her blond hair smartly coiffed, lovely yet so different from the way I remember her!

As I wave and she recognizes me, her expression appears more startled than delighted by my unannounced visit. No matter how close we were three years ago, now there seems a strangeness between us which leaves us at a loss for words. Then we both had felt a great need for each other, but no longer. Doesn't anything remain of our tender bond? Or could my unexpected appearance be an unwelcome reminder of an episode she would rather forget?

"How happy I am to see you, Simone, and how lovely you look! I just couldn't wait to see you again. Could you take a break?"

"You really catch me by surprise, Harry! I didn't expect you to drop in like this without letting me know beforehand. I am alone in the department but my colleague should return at 16 o'clock. If you care to come back we could have a chat."

I nod in agreement, leave the store and dismiss Claude, parked with the jeep around the corner. I will turn in the payroll receipts in the morning.

He teases me: "Mon Dieu! I had never thought you were such a fast worker with the ladies."

Simone leaves by the store's rear door wearing a stylish coat. Does she want to take a refreshment at the bistro across the street? No, she prefers to walk and breathe in the cool winter air. Briskly striding by her side along Haussmann Boulevard I offer her my arm, but she does not take it.

"Had it not been for the French you taught me, I would not have been able to get into France. Speaking it well enough I pretended to have lived in Paris before the war; otherwise they would never have admitted a "boche" like me."

"What brought you here so soon after the war?"

Her question opens up the floodgates of my long tale: how I came to France in search of my family whom I had believed in Strassburg,

only to find they had all been interned, that Opa had died. Oma followed him in death nine months later, and Mutti just returned to Hamburg after sixteen months of confinement. Simone listens with great sympathy; she is shocked to hear about my grandparents' passing and Yvonne's tragic death, for she had always liked and respected all of them.

Then it is her turn to unburden herself of her bitter memories: her narrow escape from the firestorm in Hamburg, her hopes for the future shattered when her fiance fell in Russia, the fear and pain of being branded a traitor on her return to France and the struggle to remake her life. Now we walk in silence side by side with our own thoughts.

"You know how much you meant to me from the moment we first met. I have never felt as close to any woman before or since as I did to you, and I feared so deeply for your life after those monstrous air raids. Do you sometimes still think of the happy moments we shared?"

"Yes, Harry, how could I forget? Believe me, you were also very special to me. Without you I don't know how I would have endured the loneliness and homesickness in that foreign land. Going there in search of happiness had been a great mistake, and I had to pay dearly for it. But now my life has begun to take a turn for the better. My family has at last forgiven me and I am making new friends, one young man in particular. I hope we might have a future together. But the memories of our bond and the respect for your family will be with me as long as I live!"

The idea that I will soon be joining my father in America excites her, and she wishes me happiness in the New World.

Since Simone has already overstayed her break we hurriedly take leave at the store's back door. We both know that this is our final goodbye despite assurances that we must meet again. "Adieu, mon amour!"

*****

Winter has loosened its grip; spring awakens new hope. I like to hear my GI pals talk nostalgically about their homeland, the country where a new tomorrow awaits me. I have not heard from Mutti for

ten weeks but try to be patient. The war has ended nearly a year ago, yet there is still no mail service to Germany. She may have heard from me, for I have written her every week through the U.S. APO military postal service in care of my friend Petsch. I trust she is safe with family or friends; hard times like these tend to bring out human kindness and caring.

"Yes, Monsieur Mewes, according to the U.S. Embassy your visa application is moving right along on the German quota," says Madame Marcus at the HIAS office with an encouraging smile. "Your turn will probably come by mid-summer if all goes well and transportation can be found. Since you have no German passport I suggest that you apply without delay for a stateless one at the Police Prefecture, to avoid delays later on. In support of your application you may need help from the Inter-Governmental Committee for Refugees at 77, Champs Elysees, near the Arc de Triomphe."

This address is halfway between my office and the "Prisunic" lunch counter. So today I skip lunch to take care of this important matter. The large waiting room of the agency is filled with refugees of all ages: men, women and children, all in need of help. The majority of them seem to be survivors of Nazi concentration camps or displaced persons from a Europe in tatters. Uncertain where to find shelter and make a fresh start, they come here for help. Seeing them downcast and disheveled makes me realize how far I have come in the last few months: adequately dressed, well-fed and housed, employed by the U.S. Army, with family here, my father expecting me in New York, and just a step away from getting my U.S. visa, everybody's dream!

An official speaking with an Alsatian accent bids me sit down in one of several minuscule office cubicles; his desk is piled high with forms and papers. He questions me about my past. While I tell him my story and show him my French repatriation card, he types on his typewriter the following document:

"The governor of this Committee, empowered by the Geneva Convention concerning the status of Refugees, certifies that according to evidence presented Mr Harry Mewes, born March 14, 1923, in Hamburg, of German background and of Jewish origin, deprived by the Nazi government of his German citizenship, is recognized as a

stateless refugee. As such he is under the protection of this Committee."

Neither to obtain my repatriation card from the French Ministry of Defense nor for this document did I furnish any proof of identity, simply because I had none. This organization is obviously empowered to provide undocumented refugees with identity papers, so essential for taking one's place in society. My statements deviated only slightly from the facts, yet I wonder whether other applicants might not take greater liberties with the truth should it serve their objectives.

*****

Maurice excitedly phones me at the office:

"Hello, Harry. Yesterday the mailman brought a letter for you from Hamburg. It shows no sender, only the seal of the military censorship, but I bet it is the long-awaited letter from your Mom."

And so it is, arriving more than ten weeks after she left the internment camp.

"My dearest Puedi: I received many letters from you through the U.S. military post office, which I was unfortunately unable to answer since until now there was no mail service. The trip by freight car to Hamburg took four exhausting days. Emma and Ella, our friends Frau Beza, the Girnts, Petsch and Puttchen all welcomed me warmly. And best of all, your former landlords, the Reifegerstes, put me up in the tiny attic that used to be yours. In fact, I sleep in your bed and on your sheets. I look down into the beautiful flower and vegetable garden which, I am sure, you will remember well. Everybody is so good to me."

I am very happy that she found shelter at the home of these kind people. As harsh as post-war life may be in Germany, what a relief that old friends and family are helping her put the misery of the past years behind her!

Inci and Maurice are sharing my joy and their dinner with me, and we toast to the future, my father and his new wife. For last week he married Anne, the lady he wrote of so often and warmly about in his letters. Since my parents were obviously not meant for each other, how wonderful that after all those restless years Father is finding

happiness with this fine, understanding lady! I am sure we will become good friends, and that as a married couple they will make me feel welcome in Manhattan.

At last the American Consulate notifies me that my the immigration visa can be issued as soon as I find transportation. I spread the good news to all my contacts at the steamship lines and HIAS. My name seems to be moving up on their waiting lists. Father is excited about the wonderful news and mails me money to pay for the fare.

*****

More good news from Germany as well as from America:

Mutti just spent two restful weeks with her sister Lotti in Passau. Under her good care she regained some of the weight she lost during her long internment, from which she returned weighing just 95 lbs. She encloses a cordial letter from Aunt Lotti and Cousins Wilfried and Uschi.

Anne, Father's new bride, also sends me a lovely letter asking me to accept her with an open mind and to allow her to be my friend. She thanks me for my "blessings" to their bond, adding:

"We have a true love for each other, great respect and understanding, and a genuine desire to make something beautiful of our life together. And you, of course, figure largely in our plans."

My life is decidedly taking a turn for the better, the worries about my mother behind me and a new beginning beckoning in America.

*****

My best chances for passage to New York are with the U.S. Line or the French Line. Prospects for finding space on an ocean liner are poor, but one of my contacts was given an option for a berth on the French freighter "Oregon," scheduled to sail from Le Havre on August 21st. Madame Marcus cautions me that the berth is in the vessel's cargo hull, outfitted for troop transport. I assure her that I won't mind it as long as the ship will get me to America. I accept the offer with pleasure and, hurrah, within three days I am in possession of my U.S. immigration visa and my passage!

Off goes a cable to Father: "Received visa and reservation French boat Oregon departing August 21st."

I resign from my job; my French co-workers and GI friends give me a warm farewell. In fact, I am the envy of everyone. I use the few remaining days till my departure to bid farewell to beautiful Paris which has become very dear to me.

*****

The "SS Oregon," docked in Le Havre, is four days late in sailing and turns out to be an old work horse of a ship, but I don't care! Built in Germany before World War I, she had been turned over to France as part of war reparations. During World War II, the Oregon served as a troop transport vessel, the cargo hull equipped with row upon row of triple-decker bunk beds. Since the demand for transportation to the United States is so great every seaworthy vessel is kept in service.

I occupy a second level bunk bed in the vessel's dark, cavernous hull. The ship is brimming with emigrants and refugees from all over Europe. All gladly put up with the primitive accommodations for the privilege of going to America, safe haven and beacon of hope!

The long trip on this old, crowded ship and the immensity of the ocean render me pensive, suspended between my youthful past and a future not yet revealed. I feel grateful for the bounty of my life, deeply beholden to those who have loved, guided and protected me, and thankful for having survived the terrible years which doomed so many. How tenuous life is!

The sea is calm. In mid-ocean I thrill to the sight of porpoises and flying fish leaping ahead of the ship's bow. Now as flocks of seagulls fly overhead, land must be near. At last, bathed by the rays of the rising sun, the long awaited, exhilarating sight: Manhattan's skyline and the Statue of Liberty, America's symbol of hope and human dignity!

POSTSCRIPT

After a full and productive life, now up in years, here ends the account of my youth before I reached the shores of this generous and hospitable country. Let me briefly summarize important later developments.

Both my father, deceased, and his gracious wife and our true friend Anne, now in her nineties, made me most welcome in New York. Building on earlier business experience and language skills, like my father before me, I devoted most of my working years to export, a fascinating and rewarding field of endeavor. The New World broadened my horizon, taught me new skills and gave me the opportunity of making up for educational deficiencies.

Though I found New York worldly and exciting, I left it after a few years to spend an interesting five years in South America. However, I did not feel fulfilled until I reached Southern California. Here in 1959 I found an outstanding employer, friend and role model, Robert L. Waldeck, whose company I had the privilege of serving as an export manager for thirty-three years. And it was also here that in 1965 I met at a hiking club a sweet lady, Anne Dempsey, of Irish-American origin, who soon became my wonderful wife and loyal life companion. In 1996, Anne concluded thirty-seven years of work in an administrative capacity at a prestigious Southern California university.

In 1949, three years after my arrival, I helped my dear mother realize her dream of coming to this country. She became a proud America booster, remarried and spent the next thirty-five years in Miami, Florida. After she became widowed we brought her to Southern California. Here she lived near us for eight years until she peacefully passed away in 2001. During those years we shared countless memories from the past.

Though often nostalgic for the sites of my childhood, it took me nearly twenty years until I felt comfortable to revisit Germany. I finally overcame my doubts because of the warmth and sincerity with which my Cousins Uschi, Wilfried and their children invited and then received my wife and me. I am always moved seeing me relatives and my native city again. By the time Anne and I visited Hamburg

together for the first time, my two old aunts had passed away, but it was a pleasure to see my loyal friend, Petsch, then in his eighties, once more. On our travels we also regularly call on my Hungarian cousin Agnes in Vienna.

Anne and I are devoting our retirement years to cultural pursuits, community service and travel.

Post-war Germany appears intent on making amends for the atrocities perpetrated by Hitler and his followers. Its government seems solidly committed to upholding the principles of democracy and being vigilant of the danger of Neo-Nazi resurgence.

The international community must assert its moral authority to help eradicate the blight of racial and religious hatred, the persecution of minorities and, after the outrageous assault on the American homeland of September 11, 2001, of international terrorism, when and wherever it occurs.

May our species outgrow its divisiveness and learn to embrace all fellow humans with dignity, equality and brotherhood, thus ushering in a new dawn for mankind!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

After leaving Europe at the age of twenty-three, Harry Mewes Santo, a linguist and an unceasing observer of the human scene, spent his vocational life in foreign trade in New York, Miami, Venezuela, and since 1958, in Southern California. He and his wife have devoted the past few years to travel and to community service, teaching languages.

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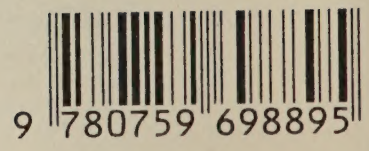

An engaging account of the author's childhood and youth in Nazi Germany, his unexpected discovery of being half-Jewish – thus stigmatized under the Nuremberg race laws, his search for his father, and his eventual quest for a new life abroad.

It provides insightful flashbacks to Hitler's coming to power and to life under his rule, the country at war, the plight of the writer's aunt – a staunchly anti-Nazi school teacher – in the hands of the Gestapo, and later to his efforts to aid and free his beloved mother and grandparents from French internment.

The diverse episodes, ordinary, heart-warming or dire, evolving in Germany, Hungary, Italy, Spain and France on the way to the New World, make for compelling reading.

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